

**RIGHTEOUSLY ENTERTAINING: PUNISHING AND CONSTRUCTING SOCIETY'S
MORAL REALITY WITH ONLINE PUBLIC SHAMINGS**

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Thesis Submitted to the University of Ottawa and the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctorate in Philosophy Criminology
and
Doctorate in Law

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Abstract

Online public shamings are a contemporary phenomenon in which someone's wrongdoing is publicized online, attracting the attention of a mass audience, which reacts to it, shaming the person and pressuring employers and business partners to cut ties with the culprit. Trying to avoid prejudgements on the phenomenon's ethics, this thesis explores *how online public shamings develop*. The investigation starts by defining the phenomenon based on five empirical cases and on the existing literature. Based on this definition and initial characteristics, two other similar phenomena were approached from a theoretical perspective, in search of a comprehensive lens for the online public shamings: moral crusades and charivaris. Based on these two phenomena, online public shamings were conceptualized as movements of deviance creation, in which online imagined communities battle to extend their rules and values to opposing publics, and at the same time they punish an individual for breaking a cherished value. By using mixed methods to analyse Twitter data, a single case study was developed. The empirical analysis revealed that online shamers are composed of several different groups, with different types of interests, both opportunistic and righteous. In the latter group, Black Twitter revealed itself as morally engaged with expanding anti-racist rules in American society. The punishment of the shamed, in this sense, represents another episode in a larger movement for social equality in America. The process of deviance creation, nonetheless, is marked by the use of punishment as entertainment and the imposition of rules and consequences without any democratic due process. Even though more research is needed to expand the conclusions of this work, this case study provides an initial framework for the development of basic aspects of online public shamings.

Acknowledgments

Every PhD student faces challenges in their dissertation that are both common to other students and specific to the researcher's trajectory. My specific challenge was to start a new life away from Rio de Janeiro and my family while writing this thesis. For making this research and a new life in Canada possible, I must thank the many people who gave me academic, professional, financial, emotional, and psychological support, besides *friendship*. My three supervisors, Jean-François Cauchie, José Roberto Xavier and Patrice Corriveau, who, besides all the support, believed in the project. I also thank my research committee, Isabelle Perreault and Álvaro Pires, whose opinions were essential in the framing of this thesis, as well as Nicolas Carrier, Richard Dubé, David Joubert, David Moffette, Dominique Robert, Maritza Felices-Luna, Stephanie Tavares, Pascale Raposo, Carmen Fullin, Frederico Fagundes, Jean Carteron, Martha Vargas, Maria Eduarda de Castro, Camille, Andréa and Bruno, Coline Moreau, Maíne Souza, Anelise Molina, Natália and Gil and Jacqueline Sinhoretto. A special thanks to the Hay family, above all Angela and Peter, for receiving me as a new member. I also thank my family (the whole gang!), most especially my mother, Tania, who filled me with care and trust. Marcelo, Alexandre, Djalma and my beloved Marquinhos: I carry you in my heart.

Stephen, this thesis goes to you.

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“Disaster Girl”. Dave Roth, 2005.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Russia is being cancelled: countries imposed economic sanctions on it, along with “companies and social activist groups” which can “pile on their own sanctions and boycotts, *without any government orders...*” (Friedman, 2022, emphasis in the original). Liz Cheney was cancelled too, by her own Republican Party, which voted her out as their #3 choice for leader for speaking against Donald Trump (Milbank, 2021).

And these are the politically cancelled. In the art world, the examples are plenty: “Maus”, by Art Spiegelman, was cancelled in Tennessee’s McMinn County by the school board; the board understood that the Holocaust depiction of Spiegelman normalized sexuality, nudity and vulgar language (Vick, 2022). Dr. Seuss Enterprises, which manages Dr. Seuss’s legacy (deceased in 1991), decided to stop printing five of his books because they contained racist imagery (CBC Kids News, 2021). *Gone with the Wind...* was taken out of HBO’s catalogue for its “ethnic and racial prejudices” (BBC, 2020). Monteiro Lobato, the father of Brazilian youth literature, who died in 1948, was also cancelled because of racist portrayals in his works (Valente, 2022). Maybe that is just historical justice, since Lobato himself had cancelled Anita Malfatti, by writing a newspaper opinion article comparing her 1917 art exposition to furuncles and paintings made by psychiatric patients (Diaz, 2022)

Children’s authors who have been cancelled are accompanied by J.K. Rowling, who was cancelled due to transphobic comments on Twitter (Luu, 2020). One of the main stars of the Harry Potter franchise, Johnny Depp, said he was also a victim of cancel culture, after allegations of domestic violence against his now ex-wife, Amber Heard (Grater, 2021). And Johnny Depp is not the only media mogul who has been cancelled: Harvey Weinstein, Woody Allen and others were cancelled during #MeToo (Jungjohann, 2021).

In higher education, cancellations are abundant: David Acevedo (2022) even keeps track of all such cases in Canada and the United States since June 2020. The list had 294 cases in May 2025, ranging from a professor who called a student “Mr. Chinaman” to another who defended the use of the term “Minor-Attracted People” to distinguish non-sex-offenders from sex-offenders (pedophiles), to a professor who mixed up the names of two black students and apologized through a way-too-long email. Students, of course, also cancel other students: the Black students organizations of several public universities in Brazil exposed online white students who had falsely declared being Black in order to take advantage of higher education admission quotas (Correio Braziliense, 2020)

And there are the unknown, private people who get cancelled for something they said or did, like Justine Sacco tweeting a joke perceived as racist (Ronson, 2015a) or Manuel Cafferty cracking his knuckles while in traffic, but being perceived as doing a white power symbol (Gstalter, 2020). Melissa Rein Lively’s became infamous after she attacked a mask stand in a Target store in Arizona, because of her belief in QAnon conspiracy theories related to COVID (Andrews, 2020)

All these cases were labelled as cancellations or, at least, part of cancel culture. They are, however, extremely different: some are about unknown, private individuals who are not public figures, others about celebrities who do something wrong. Some cases tackle education: universities and their faculty and students, while others tackle banned books and artworks. Finally, some cases that traditionally would be considered political retaliation and accountability are also called cancellations nowadays. Some of the cancelled are countries, some are dead, some are alive; some, finally, are simply objects, like books and movies. Some cancellations are current, while others happened more than a century ago.

For some people, cancel culture does not exist: it is simply a term used as a “bogyman” to explain away bad behaviour, when what is actually being demanded is responsibility for one’s actions – *consequence* culture (Schwartz, n.d.). In this way, the expression “cancel culture,” for some, became a shorthand for progressive demands that conservatives do not like (Hobbes, 2022).

In this thesis, my focus is quite small compared to all the possible meanings of cancel culture. I am interested in a specific kind of phenomenon, which, as I show in Chapter 2, here is named *online public shaming*: when someone’s wrongdoing is publicized online, attracting the attention of a mass audience, which reacts to it, shaming the person and pressuring employers and business partners to cut ties with the culprit. As such, the phenomenon represents only a small fraction of everything that has been labelled as cancel culture. In this work, the phenomenon is best exemplified by Justine Sacco, who tweeted “Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white!” on December 20, 2013, before boarding a flight to South Africa. In 12 hours, she became a world-trending topic as well as the subject of thousands of jokes, besides receiving death and rape threats. After landing, she was fired by her employer. Sacco is probably one of the most massive examples of online public shaming, but there is no lack of similar cases, be it with private people or celebrities: exposing people on the internet to pay for their misdeeds is now a common practice, on bigger or smaller scale.

Cases such as Sacco’s lead to many questions, especially considering the ideological contours that cancel culture in general and online public shamings in particular have received in recent years. In relation to online public shamings, one might ask: are they connected to one side of the political spectrum – the progressive left or the conservative right? Is there a specific demographic that is more targeted by them – women, or people of colour? Who is shamed:

private people or celebrities? Is shaming an accountability tool to be used against powerful people? Is it part of larger social movements? Why do some incidents lead to online public shaming while others do not? Who shames: the people who react to the wrongdoing or the employers who fire the shamed person? Are there other people involved? What is the role of traditional media? What about the state? How do shamers organize and communicate? What do shamers want? What do they talk about when shaming? Are the consequences the same for all shamed people? Can people resist an online public shaming? How do online public shamings develop? What starts them? What makes them go viral? How long do they last? Is there violence involved? Physical or symbolic? Is the wrongdoing prior to the attacks or vice versa? Does the wrongdoing need to be real for an online public shaming to happen? What if it is not?

At the beginning of this research (2019), the literature was very incipient in answering these and other questions. With time, works started being published about the theme, but most of the academic works published about the topic do not use systematic empirical material to understand it, and they have very varied focuses. For example, Bouvier (2020) studies the cancellation of private individuals caught in vexatious situations, while Lewis and Christin (2022) study cancel culture within the context of Youtubers and platform celebrity drama, and Clark (2020) states that cancel culture focuses mostly on celebrities and powerful people. While Clark sees the phenomenon in a mostly positive light, as a cry for justice from marginalized counterpublics, Marwick (2021, 2023) understands that minorities are the main target of morally motivated networked harassment, Saint-Louis (2021) understands that cancelling is the act of employers, and Day and Halborow (2021) criticize the phenomenon for giving managers tools to silence left-wing employees. Aitchson and Meckled-Garcia (2021), on their turn, criticize online

public shamings for tarnishing the person not the wrongdoing, and for not following due process rules.

Furthermore, the academic debate is dominated by and soaked in ethical discussions, being hard to separate the empirical analyses from ethical considerations. Marwick (2023), for example, denominates the phenomenon “morally motivated networked *harassment*”, because “The word [harassment] itself makes clear who is the good guy and who is bad” (p. 105). Clark (2020) justifies the phenomenon since “Not every critique can come wrapped up in niceties and polite speech. Nor should it. Sometimes, the urgency and weight of oppression require us to immediately cry out” (p. 89). Pfaus (2023) calls cancel culture a “cancer”, while Dyberg (2024) states that cancel culture is “unthinkable without a high-profile friend/enemy orientation fueling resentful and self-righteous activism” (p. 194). While a critical standpoint is interesting and necessary, assuming a point of view before understanding the phenomenon muddles the waters for an analytical description that is sociologically relevant.

Having this in mind, the need for a *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomenon became clear. Analyzing how the phenomenon develops, fomented by whom, with which strategies, organization, and objectives would already contribute to the understanding of it. In this way, this thesis is interested in answering the following research question: *how do online public shamings develop?*

Due to the scarce literature and its hyper-focus on ethical aspects of cancel culture, the research was conducted initially by drawing basic aspects of the phenomenon from empirical evidence. I selected five cases to be analyzed in order to define the phenomenon. In Chapter 2 (“The Many Names and Shapes of Cancel Culture: Defining the Phenomenon”), I will present and define the subject based on these five cases and on the existing literature. In this way, I will

also present how various nomenclatures have been used for the phenomenon at hand, without much discussion within the scholarship about why one name would be better than others. I will also approach different perspectives of the phenomenon and corresponding definitions and show how the literature is far from addressing the topic in a unified manner. To define the phenomenon, then, I will analyze and compare the cases of Amy Cooper (2020), Justine Sacco (2013), Lindsey Stone (2012), J.K. Rowling (2020) and Adria Richards (2013). By using these cases, I aim to illustrate, delineate and characterize what type of phenomenon is being studied here; this analysis is aided especially by the work of Marwick (2021, 2023) and Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021). From the latter authors, I adopted the nomenclature *online public shaming*, but, as I will show, the concept is developed differently from them.

Once I outline a basic understanding of what online public shaming is, I present theories and similar phenomena that can help explain it empirically and theoretically. A first phenomenon that called my attention as a possible point of comparison is that of *moral crusades*, which I investigate in Chapter 3 (“Defining Society’s Moral Reality, Defining Deviance”). The subject of studies by authors like Gusfield (1963), Becker (1963), and Zurcher et al. (1971), moral crusades had three characteristics that showed potential as a means to learn about online public shamings: their righteousness, their objective of extending a rule to *all* society, and the willingness of their participants to use any means possible to make that happen. I will show that the concepts of *deviance, interest, rule creation, rule enforcement, moral and opportunistic participation* (Becker, 1963), and also the debate over who the moral crusaders are, be it elites, grassroots or interest groups (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Jenkins, 1992) allowed me to better delineate the phenomenon and envision who participates in it. In this way, the third Chapter is the result of trying to understand the phenomenon’s relationship with the rules that constitute society and the

righteous approach of shamers to them. Based on Becker (1963) and others, I develop the comparison between online public shamings and moral crusades as phenomena in which groups, gathering means and support, push for the extension of a certain cherished rule or value to the entirety of society. I argue, along with Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009), that moral crusades are the product of grassroots movements that organize through interest groups, not discarding the possible participation of elites.

The concepts brought by studies of moral crusades helped me understand online public shamings in their role of moulding society's moral reality. Nonetheless, moral crusades and their related concepts are very much focused on activities of rule *creation*. The analysis, nonetheless, shows that online public shamings are also strong instruments of *rule enforcement*, in a dual sense: applying a rule and its sanction to a specific case and serving as an example of behaviour to the community in general. *The specific mechanisms of enforcement*, therefore, still needed specific scholarly attention. To investigate online public shamings as rule enforcement, I decided to look into a tendency in the online public shaming literature: the constant reference to pre-modern forms of punishment as a comparison to the contemporary phenomenon. These comparisons are usually made briefly and without much investigation. In Chapter 4 ("The Charivari"), I examine the specific ways in which an online public shaming functions as rule enforcement by comparing it to a family of historic phenomena: the charivari. The charivari worked throughout centuries as a community-based, public form of punishment that largely relied on laughter, shame and violence. I argue that the current phenomenon is a similar form of public shaming punishment that is used as much to set an example to the community and entertain the crowd as to correct wrongdoing.

Having the concepts of moral crusades and charivaris in mind, I outline the methodology in Chapter 5 ("Methods"). I propose a single case study – the online public shaming of Justine

Sacco. To study this case, I purchased a dataset containing more than 50,000 tweets containing the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet. This data was submitted to network analysis in order to select the most mentioned users in the network and the most repeated tweets. In this way, I was able to select 666 messages in the network to be thematically coded and then submitted to a double analysis.

Firstly, I inductively described the network, framing its main types of discourse: informative, righteous, entertaining and metadiscourse. This inductive analysis is mainly contained in Chapter 6 (“The Reaction to the Tweet and the Reaction to the Reaction: The Many Conversations around Justine Sacco”). With the inductive analysis, it is possible to conclude that, indeed, the users judge Sacco and her tweet, and they consider the consequences imposed on her to be just. Nonetheless, it is also visible that online public shamings also works as a form of entertainment. Finally, the analysis shows that the users are well aware of the power of public shaming – a topic they ponder out loud.

Secondly, I applied the concepts developed about moral crusades and charivaris to the data in a deductive process. In Chapter 7 (“Online Public Shaming”), I attempt to show how Sacco’s shaming is a full process of deviance creation, in which grassroots movements, interest groups and elites organize through networks and hashtags to advance moral and opportunistic agendas. Sacco’s case works as a great example of how anti-racism is necessary in America, and how, for some Twitter users, her shaming is a way of politicizing the individual, extending anti-racist rules to the entire society. Her shaming, nonetheless, is also a form of rule enforcement greatly resembling charivaris, in which shame, humour, and violence are used with the self-perceived righteous intentions to punish Sacco and transform her into an outsider.

Lastly, in Chapter 8 (“Final Remarks”), I consider how Sacco’s case represents the phenomenon or not, and how much of it can be extended to the other four cases examined in this thesis and other cases beyond.

CHAPTER 2: The Many Names and Shapes of Cancel Culture: Defining the Phenomenon

As can be seen, “what is a cancellation?” and “what is an online public shaming?” are confusing questions; defining the phenomena under study in this thesis, thus, is necessary before moving on to any kind of analysis. Out of everything that is called “cancellation,” what is the object of study here? In other words, it is necessary to ask how to define and differentiate this research object among so many similar and homonymous phenomena? What are its characteristics? The main objective of this chapter is to delimit not what cancellations or cancel culture are in general, but the type of event that constitutes the research subject – online public shamings. That is, in all those cases that are called cancellations and briefly described in the first chapter, only a few present the characteristics that are of interest here for building the concept of online public shaming.

To tackle these questions, I will start by observing, empirically, five representative cases. In this chapter, these cases are described in detail, using a collage of media sources. After the descriptions, the characteristics that unite the cases shall become more apparent (or not), delimiting the type of event investigated here and differentiating it from homonymous others that are often called cancellations as well. For that, I will also turn to literature that addresses this specific kind of event, observing what authors have already pointed out as relevant characteristics. I will also use the literature to reflect on the phenomenon’s nomenclature. The cases are Amy Cooper (2020), Justine Sacco (2013), Lindsay Stone/Jamie Schuh (2012), J.K. Rowling (2020), and Adria Richards/#Donglegate (2013).

1. The Central Park Birdwatching Incident (Amy Cooper, 2020)

1.1. Context and shamed person

According to the *New York Times* journalist Sarah Maslin Nir (2020b), the initial incident, which happened on May 25, 2020, involved Christian Cooper, a black man who lived in the Lower East Side of New York City and had the habit of going to Central Park to birdwatch. The shamed person was Amy Cooper, a Canadian white woman, owner of a cocker spaniel named “Henry” (Christian and Amy have the same last name but they are not related). At the time of the incident, she was head of insurance portfolio management at Franklin Templeton. On that day, Amy left home to walk Henry in Central Park. Both Amy and Christian went to an area of the park called the Ramble, which is considered one of the top spots for birdwatching in the USA; there, dogs must always be leashed, so they do not disturb fauna and flora (Simpson, 2020).

This rule had allegedly caused confrontations between dog owners and birdwatchers since at least 2015, according to Bari Weiss (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d.). Christian, an avid birdwatcher, had said in a local community meeting that he had been assaulted twice in confrontations with dog owners and that he had been filming dog owners who did not comply with the leash rule. Because of the disrespect of the rule by dog owners, Christian used to carry dog treats, in his words, “...for such intransigence.” (Simpson, 2020).

1.2. The fact and its publicization

On the day of the encounter on the Ramble, Christian was birdwatching and, according to his account on his Facebook profile, Amy arrived with the dog, which was “...tearing through

the plantings”, as narrated by Simpson (2020). Christian says that he asked her to put the dog on a leash, but that she refused, because that was the only area where the dog could exercise.

According to Amy, when she arrived at the Ramble she heard this “...loud booming voice behind [her], screaming something to the effect of get out of here, you shouldn’t be here” (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d., Section 17m40s). She said that Christian looked annoyed and upset that she was there, and that she immediately tried to grab her dog. However, he then said something that sounded like a threat (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d.). Indeed, in Christian’s account, due to her refusal to leash the dog, he said to her: “Look, if you’re going to do what you want, I’m going to do what I want, but you’re not going to like it”, to which she answered: “What’s that?” (Simpson, 2020). Amy said to Weiss’s (n.d.) podcast that she did not know what he meant, whether it was a threat to her or her dog; she also noticed that Christian had a bike helmet, which she feared he could use against her. Amy later revealed that she had been a victim of a sexual assault when she was 19. She said that, during the encounter with Christian, this past event from her life came back to her mind.

Christian says that he was simply going to offer the dog a treat, saying “Come here, puppy”, when Amy yelled, “DON’T TOUCH MY DOG!!!!!” (Simpson, 2020). Christian then started recording a video with his phone; for him, this was when the encounter took a “...dark turn” (Simpson, 2020). Amy said later that, when Christian started recording the video, his demeanour changed, from an imposing man to someone who was her victim, which made her even more confused (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d.).

In the video, made available by Christian on Facebook and on Twitter by his sister, Melody Cooper (2020b) , Amy is finishing leashing the dog and asks Christian to stop recording her. She approaches him, carrying the dog by the collar, saying: “Sir, I am asking you to stop”, to

which he answers: “Please, don’t come close to me”. She asks again for him to stop recording, and says she is going to “...call the cops”. Christian says, “Please, call the cops”, and she responds, “I am going to tell them that there is an African American man threatening my life”. “Please, tell them whatever you like!” he responds. She calls the police and informs them that she is in Central Park, where an African American man is threatening her and her dog. She repeats the information. In the video, the dog is trying to get loose, since it is being hanged by its collar, suffocating. Amy repeats the information on the phone, yelling, looking more distressed as time passes. In a later interview, Amy explained that she became more and more hysterical because the connection to 911 kept breaking up, so the emergency service could not hear her; she also said that she used the expression “African American” as merely descriptive (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d.). Finally, in the video (M. Cooper, 2020b) she puts the dog on the ground and leashes it. To this, Christian says, “Thank you” and stops recording.

Amy said, in an interview for Weiss (n.d.) that after putting her dog on the leash, a man walked up to the Ramble and, while Christian disappeared, the man accompanied Amy to the road, where they waited for the police. The police came, talked to Amy for two minutes, and after that she went home.

The video was posted by Christian (Simpson, 2020) and Melody Cooper (2020b) on the same day. Melody posted the video along with the comment:

Oh, when Karens take a walk with their dogs off leash in the famous Bramble [*sic*] in NY’s Central Park, where it is clearly posted on signs that dogs MUST be leashed at all times, and someone like my brother (an avid birder) politely asks her to put her dog on the leash (M. Cooper, 2020b).

On Twitter, the original video had, in 2021, more than 45,600,000 views, 490,000 likes, 132,000 retweets and 74,500 comments (M. Cooper, 2020b).

1.3. Reaction

After the video was posted, a person who knew Amy identified her, and her name started trending on Twitter (Nir, 2020a). Later that day, Amy received a message from a friend saying that there was a video from her circulating on the internet; the friend said: “You’ve got a problem, Soledad O’Brien just tweeted to her million-plus fans... This is not gonna be good for you” (*Honestly with Bari Weiss*, n.d.). Indeed, journalist Soledad O’Brien had retweeted the video with the comment “In case you’re wondering if some people are willing to put the lives of others at risk by calling the cops on them, and [*sic*] lying about the threat. Imagine doing this KNOWING you are being recorded.” (O’Brien, 2020).

Amy, in an interview with the Bari Weiss podcast (2021), said that she started receiving threatening messages and phone calls. She was doxed, that is, all her personal data (name, phone, social media, employment details, etc.) was publicized online, and the Wikipedia page of Frank Templeton, her employer, was altered to include the video. In the Bari Weiss interview, she read one of the messages she had received following the Central Park Birdwatching Incident:

Amy Cooper, from New York, if that is indeed you in one of these videos, slit your wrists. You are a piece of shit. Both the way you treated that man as well as the dog are clear that the world would be a better place if you were no longer in it. You are pathetic and vile. Someone should put that leash around your neck and drop you from one of those trees. I hope to God that they prosecute you for animal cruelty as well as lying to Law Enforcement. Maybe in jail, you get treated as you deserve. If anyone deserves prison rape, it’s you. Every breath you take is a breath better suited for someone else. You bring dishonour on you and the whole humanity. A noble thing to do is to remove yourself from society as a whole, so please kill yourself (Weiss, 2020, Section 01h06m14s).

Internet sleuths found Amy’s profile dedicated to her dog Henry on Instagram and started sharing and saving pictures in which the dog was injured, leading Amy to surrender the animal back to its shelter (Nir, 2020a). Amy also called her family, instructing them to deny knowing her or ever having a child with her name, and she also left her apartment to go to a safe house (Weiss, 2021).

On the same day as the Central Park birdwatching incident, George Floyd was killed by the Minneapolis Police. The media compared the two cases: Amy was compared to the woman who accused Emmett Till prior to Till's lynching in 1945, and the media considered her increased despair in the video to be a performance for the police (Honestly with Bari Weiss, n.d.).

1.4. Consequences and shamed person's reaction

On the day following the incident, Amy released an apology statement:

I want to apologize to Chris Cooper for my actions when I encountered him in Central Park yesterday. I reacted emotionally and made false assumptions about his intentions when, in fact, I was the one who was acting inappropriately by not having my dog on a leash. When Christian began offering treats to my dog and confronted me in an area where there was no one else nearby and said, "You're not going to like what I'm going to do next," I assumed we were being threatened when all he had intended to do was record our encounter on his phone. He had every right to request that I leash my dog in an area where it was required. I am well aware of the pain that misassumptions and insensitive statements about race cause and would never have imagined that I would be involved in the type of incident that occurred with Christian. I hope that a few mortifying seconds in a lifetime of forty years will not define me in his eyes and that he will accept my sincere apology (A. Cooper, 2020).

Her employer, Franklin Templeton, had fired Amy earlier that day (Nir, 2020a). Later, Amy fled the USA and went to an undisclosed location, where she still was when interviewed by Kmele Foster for the Bari Weiss podcast (2021), more than a year later. Moreover, after the online pressure and demonstrations in front of the Manhattan District Attorney Office, Amy was charged with a misdemeanour for falsely filing a police report.

Christian appeared on the TV show *The View* with his sister and had his experience praised by politicians such as Barack Obama (Nir, 2020b). To the *New York Times* and *The View* (Nir, 2020b; *The View*, 2020), Christian declared that, in the moment of the incident, he refused to be part of his own dehumanization; he also declared, however, that he was conflicted about the consequences for Amy. In *The View* interview (2020), about the death threats Amy was receiving, he made the point that, if people were against Amy calling the cops and, thus,

threatening Christian's life, it would be as wrong to threaten her life in return. He also said: "I am uncomfortable with defining someone with seconds of what they've done. You know, it was a stressful situation, she had a moment of very poor judgement... no excusing that it was a racist act, because it was a racist act, but does that define her entire life? I don't know, only she can tell us if that defines her entire life, by what she does going forward and she has done in the past..." (5m8s). He also accepted Amy's apology during his interview on *The View*.

The charges against Amy were dropped after she completed therapy, including instruction on racial bias (Pengelly, 2021). Christian chose not to cooperate with the prosecution of the case due to his understanding that people should not focus on a single individual, and that the incident was important to show the racial structural bias in the USA. Moreover, he said the incident paled when compared to other cases of racial injustice, such as Washington D.C. not achieving statehood (Helmore, 2021). In 2022, National Geographic announced that Christian would host the show *Extraordinary Birders*, to be aired on Disney+ (Moynihan, 2022). Christian won a daytime Emmy Award in 2023 for the show.

2. #HasJustineLandedYet (2013)

2.1. Context and shamed person

Unlike the Central Park birdwatching incident, Justine Sacco did not engage in any confrontation with another person; actually, the precipitating fact was a joke she posted on the internet directed at no one in particular. The distinguishing aspect of Sacco's case is that, because she was on an international flight, her online shaming became a countdown of excitement, fun and rage until the moment she would land and realize she was a world trending topic and a public pariah. Later, Sacco's case became widely known due to being profiled in

journalist Jon Ronson's *New York Times* article (2015a) and book, *So You Have Been Publicly Shamed* (2016).

2.2. The fact and its publicization

In December 2013, Justine Sacco was about to board an eleven-hour flight to South Africa to visit her family, whose members were long-time defenders of racial equality and supporters of Nelson Mandela's party, the African National Congress (Ronson, 2015a). Sacco was 30 years old at the time and worked as a high-ranking public relations manager at InterActivCorp (IAC) (Ronson, 2015a). She had a Twitter account with 170 followers, and, before boarding, she decided to write a post: "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" (Vingiano, 2013). On a later occasion, Sacco explained that her tweet was not supposed to be interpreted literally as making fun of the AIDS epidemic in Africa, but as a joke about privileged people who think in such a narrow way (Ronson, 2015a). Sacco, then, took her flight and went offline.

In this case, the fact and its publicization are the same single act, that is, a joke tweeted by Sacco. She had a small Twitter following, but one of those followers was able to reach out to someone with a much larger audience, making Sacco's tweet go viral. According to *Buzzfeed* (Vingiano, 2013), while Sacco's phone was on airplane mode, one of her Twitter followers sent the AIDS tweet to journalist Sam Biddle, who retweeted it. Biddle had approximately 15,000 followers, and he commented on Sacco's message, criticizing it and identifying Sacco's job and employer: "Very funny/cool AIDS/Africa joke from IAC's head of corporate communications, great work". *Buzzfeed* also reports that other journalists, also started interacting with Sacco's account, noting that, being Friday, it was a slow news day.

2.3. Reaction

Then, Twitter users also started to react to Sacco's message. Some explicitly pointed out the racism in it, saying, for example, "I love that we have no idea where @JustineSacco is going because 'Africa.'" (user S1). Others compared Sacco's "Just kidding" expression to those who say they are not racists because they have black friends (users S2 and S3). Among the reactions, and while Sacco was still flying, the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet was created (Vingiano, 2013), becoming a world-trending topic. Twitter users waited for the moment when Sacco would land and become online, to find out that she was now the object of Twitter hate.

While Sacco was flying, the company Gogo, which supplies internet access during flights, used the uproar to make its brand visible, tweeting, "Next time you plan to tweet something stupid before you take off, make sure you are getting on a @Gogo flight! CC: @JustineSacco" (Vingiano, 2013). At the same time, non-profit organizations asked for donations to fight AIDS (Vingiano, 2013).

Major media outlets picked up the story, such as the CNN (Stelter, 2013b) and ABC networks (Dimitrova, 2013). Sacco's Twitter account was searched for other misdeeds, such as the tweet "I had a sex dream about an autistic kid last night" (Ronson, 2015a) and "I can't be fired for things I say while intoxicated right?" (Stelter, 2013b). The *Buzzfeed Community* site created a list of "16 Tweets Justine Sacco Regrets", such as using the word "retarded", calling people ugly, and making jokes about rape kits (jenvesp, 2013).

While Sacco was still flying, her employer, IAC, stated that her tweet was unacceptable (Ronson, 2015a).

2.4. Consequences and shamed person's reaction

Interestingly, in Sacco's case, consequences started to be felt at a very specific point in time: when she landed in South Africa. As told by Ronson (2015):

When the plane landed in Cape Town and was taxiing on the runway, she turned on her phone. Right away, she got a text from someone she hadn't spoken to since high school: "I'm so sorry to see what's happening." Sacco looked at it, baffled. Then another text: "You need to call me immediately." It was from her best friend, Hannah. Then her phone exploded with more texts and alerts. And then it rang. It was Hannah. "You're the No. 1 worldwide trend on Twitter right now," she said.

First, Sacco deleted her tweet and Twitter account, and later she issued an apology, classifying her tweet as needless and careless (Stelter, 2013b):

Words cannot express how sorry I am, and how necessary it is for me to apologize to the people of South Africa, who I have offended due to a needless and careless tweet. There is an AIDS crisis taking place in this country, that we read about in America, but do not live with or face on a continuous basis. Unfortunately, it is terribly easy to be cavalier about an epidemic that one has never witnessed firsthand.

For being insensitive to this crisis — which does not discriminate by race, gender or sexual orientation, but which terrifies us all uniformly — and to the millions of people living with the virus, I am ashamed.

This is my father's country, and I was born here. I cherish my ties to South Africa and my frequent visits, but I am in anguish knowing that my remarks have caused pain to so many people here; my family, friends and fellow South Africans. I am very sorry for the pain I caused (Nededog, 2013).

In a few interviews with Ronson (2015a) after what happened, Sacco told him how much she had cried and could not sleep. She also told him that, when arriving in South Africa, she was scolded by an aunt who said Sacco could have ruined the family's reputation as long-time activists for social equality. Sacco lost her job and told Ronson she was unable to date any more since any potential date would Google her and find out about the tweet. However, she told Ronson she was determined to turn things around.

Indeed, after the episode, Sacco went to Ethiopia to do volunteer work for a month, after which she came back to New York to be hired by a dating site (Ronson, 2015a). The hiring was criticized by Sam Biddle, the journalist who initially retweeted Sacco's AIDS tweet (Biddle, 2014a). So Sacco decided to invite Biddle for drinks one night, because she thought "...this

couldn't go on" (Ronson, 2015a). During their meeting, he apologized. Months later, and almost one year after the event, Biddle (2014b) wrote a column apologizing to Sacco. By that time, Biddle had been online public shamed for a joke he had tweeted.

In 2018, Sacco was hired as a top communications manager of the Match Group, owned by IAC, her former employer (Wagner, 2018).

3. Lindsey Stone (2012)

Lindsey Stone's case is different from both the cases of Sacco and Cooper in its *content*, the political ideology involved: the debate is not about racism. Stone was shamed for disrespecting the memory of dead American soldiers.

3.1. Context and shamed person

According to Ronson (2015b), in 2012, Lindsey Stone was a caregiver in a home for people with learning disabilities—LIFE: Living Independently Forever. Her job and that of one of her co-workers, Jamie Schuh, included taking the residents of LIFE on day trips, such as going to the movies or bowling. Stone and Schuh also had a recurring inside joke: taking pictures that mimicked statues or disobeyed signs. For example, they had a picture of themselves loitering under a non-loitering sign (Rowles, 2015).

In 2012, a work trip took Stone, Schuh and the residents of LIFE to Washington, D.C., where they visited several national landmarks, including the Arlington National Cemetery (Ronson, 2015b), a large, active military cemetery with the graves of over six hundred thousand service members, veterans, and their loved ones, and location of the US Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

3.2. The fact and its publicization

In the Arlington Memorial, Stone and Schuh decided to keep their recurring joke when they saw a sign near the Tomb of the Unknown soldier that said “Arlington National Cemetery” and “Silence and Respect,” (Ronson, 2015b). They took a photo where Lindsey is pretending to be shouting and is showing the middle finger in front of the sign.

Schuh posted the picture on Facebook and tagged Stone, with her consent, where the picture stayed for about a month without being noticed; Schuh’s Facebook settings did not make the picture private (Ronson, 2015b).

3.3. Reaction

Initially, a friend who served in the military commented on the Facebook post that he understood their joke, but that he found it tasteless and offensive; a few people agreed, but Lindsey did not want to take it down (Ronson, 2015b). So, about one month later, Stone and Schuh

...were in a restaurant, celebrating their birthdays... when they became aware that their phones were vibrating repeatedly. So they went online.

“Lindsey Stone hates the military and hates soldiers who have died in foreign wars”, “You should rot in hell”, “Just pure Evil”, “Spoke with an employee from Life [company where Stone worked] who has told me there are veterans on the board and that she will be fired. Awaiting info on her accomplice”, “After they fire her, maybe she needs to sign up as a client. Woman needs help”, “Send the dumb feminist to prison”. There were death and rape threats. (Ronson, 2015b).

A Change.org petition was created (H, 2012) and got the support of 2,983 people, demanding LIFE to “Fire Lindsay [*sic*] Stone for her disrespect of our nation while on company time”, and justifying that “Lindsay [*sic*] Stone was a representative of your company while on the trip to D.C. Her actions reflect on her employer. She showed poor judgment and lack of character”. On the Change.org web page, people gave their reasons to sign the petition, as these examples show:

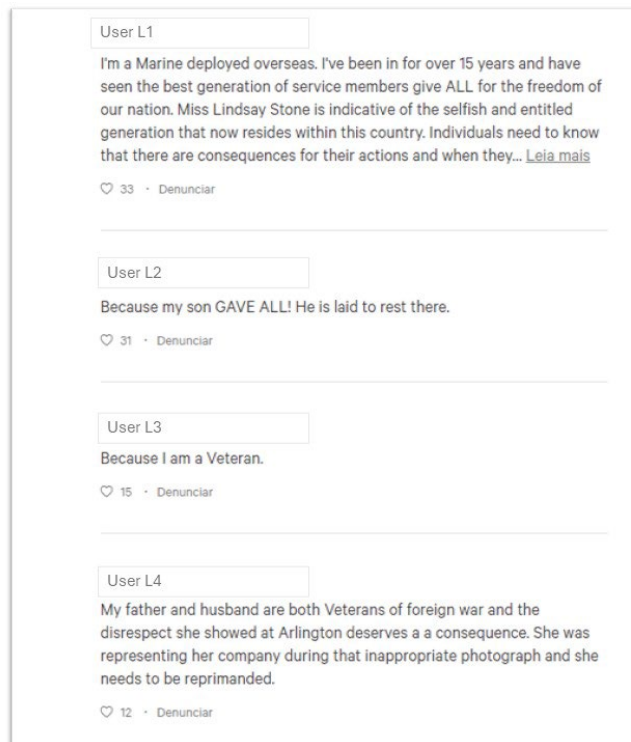


Figure 1: A print screen of the comment section of the change.org petition "Fire Lindsay Stone" [sic] (H, 2012). The users' names and pictures have been anonymized.

A Facebook page called "Fire Lindsey Stone" was also created, reaching 30,000 members (Zimmerman, 2012b), but the catchphrase soon turned into "Set Fire on Lindsey Stone", accompanied by death and rape threats (Rowles, 2015). In 2022, the Facebook page no longer existed, and Facebook's search mechanism only provided two results to posts with the words "Fire", "Lindsey" and "Stone". One of them asks people to join the Fire Lindsey Stone Facebook page (user L5). The other one, by user L6, however, was more emphatic: according to that user, Stone lacks human decency; she deserved not only to be fired – she should also be beaten, be made homeless, be exposed to cold weather, and apologize to every family who lost a member in service. The user finishes by saying that the US would be better off if Stone simply died.

On Twitter, one can still find many posts on the topic. People expressed that Lindsey deserved the treatment she was receiving and showed satisfaction when she was dismissed: they

were happy for the weight that had been dropped on her because she disrespected a grave site (user L7) and thrilled that she had lost her job (user L8).

The case attracted the attention of broadcast media, which showed up at Stone's door with cameras (Ronson, 2015b).

3.4. Consequences and the shamed person's reaction

Initially, Lindsey tried to downplay the seriousness of her photograph; she commented on the picture:

Whoa whoa whoa... wait... This is just us, being the douchebags that we are, challenging authority in general. Much like the pic posted the night before, of me smoking right next to a no smoking sign. OBVIOUSLY we meant NO disrespect to people that serve or have served our country (Zimmerman, 2012a).

LIFE put both Lindsey and Schuh on unpaid leave, stating that "This photograph in no way reflects the opinions or values of the LIFE organization, which holds our nation's veterans in the highest regard..." (Zimmerman, 2012a). Stone and Schuh also published a statement apologizing, in which they said they were sorry and recognized that the photograph was in poor taste; they also noticed that the picture was posted on a public forum, but it was intended only for their private amusement; moreover, they argued, the joke was just a pun with the plaque, that had nothing to do with the meaning of the Arlington National Cemetery (Stone & Schuh, 2012).

Notwithstanding, Lindsey was fired by LIFE the next day, in her job's parking lot since she was not allowed inside the building. The company issued the following statement:

... we deeply regret any disrespect to members of the military and their families. The incident and publicity has been very upsetting to the learning disabled population we serve. To protect our residents, any comments, however well-intentioned, will be deleted. We appreciate your concern and understanding as we focus on the care of our community (Zimmerman, 2012b).

Lindsey told Ronson (2015b) that she became obsessed with reading all the comments about her. For almost a year, she stayed home. When she applied for jobs, she almost never got a

response. When, more than a year later, she got a job, she became paranoid that her employer would find out about the incident and so she was afraid to let them know about it.

Later, Ronson (2016) helped Lindsay clean her online reputation. While writing *So You Have Been Publicly Shamed*, the journalist got in touch with the company Reputation.com, which could make Lindsay's negative results on Google disappear or at least go to the third page of the search results. Ronson then suggested that Michael Fertik, owner of the company, use this procedure, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, to help Stone. Indeed, with time, the company managed to bring positive results for Stone to the top of the Google search results page.

As of August 2025, however, a Google search for her name still produces pictures of Stone at the Arlington National Cemetery as the top results.

4. J.K. Rowling's anti-Trans rights tweets

4.1. Context and shamed person

J.K. Rowling's case differs significantly from the previous ones by the simple fact that Joanne Rowling, her real name, is the author of the highly successful Harry Potter book series. The Harry Potter franchise made, in 2016, \$25 billion in sales of books, movies, DVDs, toys and rentals (Fahey, 2016). Rowling became the first billionaire author, but she lost that status partially due to her donations to charity of £160 million (Weisman, n.d.). She had, in 2025, more than 14 million followers on Twitter. This means that Rowling was not, when her shaming happened, in any way unknown or lacking financial or media resources. As I will show, these resources allowed her not only to keep her status and finances but also to fight back against her shaming, reaffirming her convictions.

In sum, J.K. Rowling was shamed because of her open defence of ideas perceived by some as transphobic. These views are unexpected because Rowling's involvement with the LGBTQ+ cause is longstanding and nuanced, and she has specifically defended trans people in the past.

In 2007, after finishing the Harry Potter series of books, Rowling revealed that a main character, Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts and mentor of Harry Potter, was gay (Coggan, 2019). She has defended this outing on other occasions, even in strong terms (Rowling, 2014, 2015; McNally, 2015), and explained that the School of Magic of Hogwarts was a safe place for all kinds of people, including LGBT people (Strang, 2014). These statements, however, received criticism from parts of the media, as Dumbledore's sexuality was never explicitly addressed in the books or movies (Coggan, 2019).

In relation to trans people, in 2017 Rowling criticized commentator Tomi Lahren for complimenting President Donald Trump's decision to ban transgender people from the military (Weiss, 2021.). However, in that same year, Rowling's image as a TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) started to be formed. On Twitter, she "liked" an article against gender self-identification, and her public relations team explained that the "like" was an accident (Walker, 2020). An incident similar to this that happened in March 2018 had a similar explanation from her PR team (Walker, 2020). In December 2019, for the first time, Rowling herself tweeted criticism of trans activism, giving her support to Maya Forstater, who had lost her job due to a tweet saying that "men cannot change into women" (Walker, 2020).

4.2. The facts and their publicization

Finally, in June 2020, Rowling published a series of tweets and blog posts that started the shaming process. She tweeted on June 6 a link for a news piece that used the expression "people

who menstruate” in its headline; Rowling commented about the headline choice of words: “‘People who menstruate’: I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumbem? Wimpund? Woomud?” (Rowling, 2020).

The post was considered a direct criticism of trans people since women who transitioned to men do menstruate but are considered men, not women. In the face of the backlash, Rowling doubled down on her opinions in a thread of tweets, defending her view that “sex” is a reality and that it is essential to understand the female experience, even she declared to love trans people (Rowling, 2020c). A few days later, she published a manifesto on her website defending her ideas about gender and sex and saying that loosening the criteria of what a man or a woman is exposes women to ill-intentioned men in exclusively-female spaces like lockers and bathrooms (Rowling, 2020a).

4.3. Reaction

The online reaction to Rowling’s opinions in June 2020 was considerable, containing critiques, cursing, and dialogue. Moreover, the subject of the discontentment was Rowling’s opinions on trans rights, which were considered transphobic. I did not observe collective requests that she should suffer some penalty, such as the creation of online petitions, but organized Harry Potter fan groups such as MuggleNet did critique her and partially boycotted the author.

Twitter users characterized Rowling’s position as disappointing (user R1) and disgraceful (user R2), questioning why she was willing to take a stance on this issue (user R3 and user R2). The users also engaged in the conversation, trying to demonstrate to Rowling how she was wrong, explaining that menstruating is not what defines someone as a woman, exemplifying with the cases of women in menopause (user R4), with IUDs (user R5), or several other conditions that involve not menstruating (user R6).

Respondents attempted to sensitize Rowling to the fact that language matters when addressing gender issues, as feminists have done before, by using words like "firefighter" instead of "fireman" (user R7). They also pointed out that changing language is a small step that can nonetheless help diminish violence against trans people (user R8), and that her tweet was not helping to create a supportive environment for trans people, who are fighting for their lives (user R9).

As in Sacco's case, among the responses, there were also companies that took advantage of the debate to promote their brand. The British company The Body Shop (2020), which sells cosmetics, tweeted the following message: "Hey @jk_rowling here's something we made earlier, we thought you might like one! We've also popped in a vegan bath bomb and a copy of Trans Rights by @paisleycurrah for you to read in the bath!" The message was accompanied by the image of a red tote bag written "It's bloody natural". Many Twitter users also criticized Rowling by cursing and insulting her: she was called a bitch (user R10), a bastard (user R11), and told to grow up in explicit terms (user R12).

Some recommended that Twitter users stop quoting Rowling on the social network so trans people would not see her on their timelines (user R13), while others observed that forcing Rowling off Twitter would be hard due to her celebrity status (user R14). A journalist called for the cancellation (Porter, 2019), and actors connected to the Harry Potter franchise (Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint and Eddie Redmayne) publicly responded and criticized Rowling's position (Vary & Vary, 2020). Moreover, part of her fan base, represented by the websites MuggleNet and The Leaky Cauldron, made joint announcements debunking the author's opinions; they also decided to no longer cover her personal and professional life if not related to the wizarding universe of her fiction (Luu, 2020). Both websites also decided to

always refer to Rowling using the hashtag #JKR, to make it easier to block references to her or her tweeted opinions (Luu, 2020):

Although it is difficult to speak out against someone whose work we have so long admired, it would be wrong not to use our platforms to counteract the harm she has caused. Our stance is firm: Transgender women are women. Transgender men are men. Non-binary people are non-binary. Intersex people exist and should not be forced to live in the binary. We stand with *Harry Potter* fans in these communities, and while we don't condone the mistreatment JKR has received for airing her opinions about transgender people, we must reject her beliefs. (MuggleNet, n.d.).

However, it is important to notice that, even though there was a great backlash to Rowling's opinions, there were also those who supported her. She had more than 44,000 comments and retweets on her initial post, but also more than 82,000 likes. This shows that, despite the controversy, Rowling also had a large base of support.

It is hard to say why Rowling had such support when other shamed people were simply wiped out by public opinion, with hardly any help or defence. Many factors should be considered: Rowling's enormous media presence and her status as a philanthropist and author of beloved children's books are a couple of them. Another factor is the content: perhaps transphobia does not cause such uproar as racism (Cooper, Sacco) or offending the supporters of dead military members, veterans and their families (Stone). In November 2021, Rowling (2021c) revealed that she had received so many death threats that she "...could paper the house" with them. On the occasion, she reported that three trans activists had posted her family address on Twitter (Rowling, 2021d)

4.4. Consequences

The consequences for Rowling were different from the ones suffered by Cooper, Sacco, and Stone. In addition to the decision by fan sites MuggleNet and The Leaky Cauldron to restrict news about her, there was news that her book sales underperformed during the month of June

2020 (Pocock, 2020). It is worth noting that the book's sales underperformance has not been confirmed, nor has the causal link been established between sales and Rowling's transphobic tweets. However, a Harry Potter-themed book event was cancelled in New Zealand (O'Neill, 2021), and a secondary school in England gave up naming one of its houses after Rowling (Sales, 2022). These reactions occurred more than a year after the original tweets.

On the other hand, BBC journalist Amol Rajan (2020) considered Rowling's blog post on trans people as one of the best pieces of writing of 2020, nominating her and four other authors for the his lighthearted "Russell Prize" in 2020. The journalist praised Rowling's bravery for facing the trolling and cancelling, but most importantly for having great prose.

In 2022, Rowling did not participate in the Harry Potter twentieth anniversary special reunion, "Return to Hogwarts"; some people believed that, due to her transphobic comments, she was snubbed by the production (O'Connor, 2022).

The consequences faced by Rowling were, then, financial and social, but must be put into perspective, compared to the author's financial and social status. In this sense, it is a very different case from that of Amy Cooper, who lost her job and had to go to an undisclosed location due to her shaming: Rowling kept her financial and social status, with her books, plays and movies still being released. Indeed, in 2022, a Twitter user asked Rowling "how do you sleep at night knowing you've lost a whole audience from buying your books," to which Rowling responded, "I read my most recent royalty cheques and find the pain goes away pretty quickly" (Rowling, 2022).

4.5. Shamed person's Reactions

Rowling did not retreat, ask forgiveness or excuse herself. Instead, she co-signed a letter defending “Justice and Open Debate” (Ackerman et al., 2020). In 2021, she revealed she had been doxxed and was receiving death threats, but wrote that, even so, “...I haven't stopped speaking out” (Rowling, 2021c). In the doxxing episode, she posted the Twitter handle of the three activists who published her address (Rowling, 2021b). The three activists received several threatening and transphobic messages, leading them to deactivate their Twitter accounts and to take down the information about Rowling's address (Kelleher, 2021).

In December 2021, Rowling tweeted a critical article by *The Times* of London against the Scottish Police decision to “record rapes by offenders with male genitalia as being committed by a woman” if the offender identified as a woman. Quoting George Orwell's *1984*, she commented: “War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength. The Penis Individual Who Raped You Is a Woman” (Rowling, 2021a).

5. Adria Richards / Donglegate

5.1. Context and Shamed People

Donglegate is a peculiar case because of its double shaming: Adria Richards initially shamed two engineers for making sexual jokes in a conference but Richards herself was shamed for shaming the engineers. All the shamed individuals involved worked for tech companies; maybe because of that, the shaming of Richards gained momentum in forums like Hacker News and 4Chan, eventually reaching Twitter.

It is also interesting to notice that Richards, as a “developer evangelist” (an advocate for tech developers) employed by tech company SendGrid had some public recognition, being a

public speaker and participating in podcasts (Blum, 2013) and having a following on Twitter of more than 8,000 people at the time (Richards, 2013f). The other two people involved, engineers at PlayHaven, did not have their identities revealed, even though their picture remains on the internet, where it can be found through searches related to the case. There is no indication that they had a public presence as big as Richards'. All the people involved met during PyCon US 2013, which is "...the largest annual gathering for the community using and developing the open-source Python programming language" (*PyCon*, n.d.).

5.2. The Shamed Fact and its Publicization

On March 17, 2013, Richards was attending one of the PyCon talks (Ronson, 2015d). Sitting behind her, two men were chatting when they started making jokes about "forking repos" (copying repositories) and "big dongles" (pieces of hardware used to attach computers to cellphones) (Richards, 2013g). As reported by Ronson (2015d), who interviewed both Richards and the engineers:

He [one of the men seated behind Richards] murmured the joke to his friend ... "It was so bad, I don't remember the exact words," he said. "Something about a fictitious piece of hardware that has a really big dongle, a ridiculous dongle... It wasn't even conversation-level volume."

Adria, however, overheard their conversation and became bothered by its sexual content; it was not the first time she had to deal with this kind of joke in a professional environment, and she told herself "...if they made one more sexual joke, I'd say something" (Richards, 2013g).

On her blog, Richards (2013g) wrote that, at that moment, the speaker onstage showed a picture of a little girl learning how to code, and, because of it, she decided to take action: "I realized I had to do something or she would never have the chance to learn and love programming because the ass clowns behind me would make it impossible for her to do so". Richards also believed that they should be accountable and that the anonymity in the crowd (the

room had around 1,000 people) made the men feel safe: "...being anonymous was fueling their behaviour." She labelled the phenomenon deindividuation and that linked it to lynching, violent mobs, genocide and online antinormative behavior.

She then turned around, took a picture of the two men and posted it on Twitter, commenting: "Not cool. Jokes about forking repo's in a sexual way and 'big' dongles. Right behind me #pycon" (Richards, 2013c). She then tagged PyCon on another tweet, indicating where the problem was: "Can someone talk to these guys about their conduct? I'm in lightning talks, top right near stage, 10 rows back [#pycon](#)" (Richards, 2013b). She also posted a follow-up with the code of conduct of the PyCon conference, which mandated appropriate communication for all audiences and the ban of any racist, sexist or exclusionary jokes (Richards, 2013g).

Ten minutes later, the two men were called by the PyCon team to a private room to explain themselves (Ronson, 2015d), and the organization tweeted: "Thank you @adriarichards for bringing comments to our attention. We've dealt with the situation" (PyCon US, 2013).

On that day, Richards (2013a) tweeted about how she felt on that moment: "As an advocate for digital equality, my actions today at #pycon made me feel like Joan of Arc, minus the visions". And on a blog post on the next day, she expressed that, "As I walked back to my seat, I cannot tell you how proud I was of the PyCon and Python community at the very moment for keeping their word to make the conference a safe place to be" (Richards, 2013g) .

5.3. Reaction, contra-reaction

Two days after the event, on March 19, an anonymous user called "mr-hank" (2013) self-identified as one of the engineers who appeared in Richards' tweet. He was answering a post

about the PyCon incident published the day before on Hacker News, a “...social news website focused on computer science...” (“Hacker News,” 2021). Mr-hank (2013) said:

...First of all I'd like to say I'm sorry. I really did not mean to offend anyone and I really do regret the comment and how it made Adria feel. She had every right to report me to staff, and I defend her position. However, there is another side to this story. While I did make a big dongle joke about a fictional piece hardware that identified as male, no sexual jokes were made about forking...

My second comment is this, [*sic*] Adria has an audience and is a successful person of the media... With that great power and reach comes responsibility. As a result of the picture she took I was let go from my job today. Which sucks because I have 3 kids and I really liked that job.

She gave me no warning, she smiled while she snapped the pic and sealed my fate. Let this serve as a message to everyone, our actions and words, big or small, can have a serious impact.

The two men in the picture were identified as PlayHaven engineers. PlayHaven confirmed it fired one engineer (Koetsier, 2013) due to the comments made during PyCon, but noted that it respected its employees' privacy and would not comment on all the factors that led to his dismissal (Holt, 2013).

It is unclear when the backlash against Richards started. According to her, she first noticed the vitriol directed at her on Twitter on Monday night, after which someone on social media told her to check mr-hank's post on Hacker News (McEwan, 2015). So, Richards (2013d) responded to mr-hank on the same forum:

Hey,

Thanks for speaking up, contributing your viewpoint on HN and not attacking me.

I'm sorry to hear your employer deciding to not to work with you on this and I hope they reconsider, bring you back on and dealing with it constructively.

For context, I'm a developer evangelist.

...

The forking joke set the stage for the dongle joke.

Yes, this time I decided I didn't want to argue my perspective. I decided instead to accept it bothered me and took action based on the PyCon Code of Conduct. It sounds like if I'd said something about the forking you would have denied it having a sexual association. Not sure if I smiled but I'm also unsure what facial expression you would have expected.

I just got done writing my blog post you can read here:

[link to blog post]

See you next year.

The debates around the topic spread to Twitter and 4Chan forums, with attacks, according to Richards (McEwan, 2015), being planned by 4Chan participants. The hashtag #Donglegate was created, being used 1,000 times in one day, March 20; on Reddit, almost 100 unique threads were created to debate the topic (b., 2013). The 4Chan Forums contained “...ways to harm, harass, and humiliate [Richards] and the other women they were targeting” (McEwan, 2015). She started

... being attacked with the vile words people use only when attacking women. They called her a man-hater (this was the nicest thing they said) who robbed a father of three of his livelihood. Then the threats began on Twitter, on her blog, on Facebook. She should get raped, she should be fired, she should be killed, she should kill herself (Blum, 2013).

Richards was doxxed and she had to leave her apartment due to the threats. Moreover, an older tweet of Richards, in which she made a penis joke, was found, and people pointed to her as a hypocrite (b., 2013).

A petition on Change.org was started, asking, “Please fire Adria Richards” (Lough, 2013). The petition was based on allegations that Adria was an influential person on Twitter and, therefore, should not make sexist jokes, offensive remarks to minorities, and remarks about introversion that offend people with autism (these affirmations might be based on Adria’s previous posts on social media, but there is no confirmation of that) (Lough, 2013).

Then, SendGrid, Richards’ employer, was threatened and suffered a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyberattack (Blum, 2013) (McEwan, 2015). According to McEwan (2015), this attack came along with a letter demanding Richards’ termination¹. The author of the apocryphal

¹ It is not possible to verify the origin of the letter, which is just an archived copy and paste document (*Untitled*, n.d.). Merino (2013), however, also refers and provides a link to the same document.

document says that he or she is not threatening SendGrid, but only informing what Anonymous, the cyber-activist hacker group, would do if Richards was not fired (*Untitled*, 2013). It is worth quoting here the second paragraph of the letter:

Anonymous has reviewed the situation and rendered judgment using their collective wisdom and experience. Adria Richards engaged in malicious conduct to destroy the another [*sic*] individual's professional career due to what she perceived as an affront to her own extremist views from a comment that was not directed at her, not meant for her to hear, and certainly not for her to provide unwarranted input on. As such, she should have her professional career destroyed just like her victim in order for justice to be rendered and balance restored to the universe. The hivemind's judgement is final and there is no appeal. No forgiveness, no forgetting remember? (*Untitled*, 2013)

The letter threatened SendGrid's business, its clients and its employees with online vandalism, defamation, obnoxious phone calls and emails, but also with doxxing and the disclosure of any malicious or illegal activity that the attackers might find (*Untitled*, 2013)

Initially, Richards (2013e) made it public that SendGrid supported her. However, on March 21, the company publicly fired her through a post on its website (Franklin, 2013). On the post, the company defended Richards' right to report inappropriate behaviour, but condemned her way of reporting the conduct, by publicly shaming the individuals. Moreover, considering that Richards was a developer evangelist, the company understood that she should unite the community, not divide it, as happened after her tweet. SendGrid stated that it preferred to protect its businesses and employees from the danger Richards has imposed on them.

Richards had to "couch surf" for one year by staying at the houses of one person after another after leaving her apartment because of the threats she was receiving; she said, also, about the incident (McEwan, 2015):

I saw rumors repeated and spread across social media yet I felt powerless to do anything as my goal was to diffuse the situation. At that time, I was receiving hundreds of messages a day across all social channels from harassers: email, phone, Twitter. I had changed my Facebook page to "private" and restricted all her Flickr images to "All Rights Reserved" to stop the harassers from taking images of me and attaching them to women in pornographic poses (Richards, contributing to McEwan, 2015).

Despite all that, Richards kept tweeting and referring to living a life without shame (Richards, 2013f). In 2015, Jon Ronson's book and *New York Times* article (2015d, 2016) were published, featuring the Donglegate story. Richards, who was interviewed by Ronson, later said that the journalist had used her for selling books, while leaving out of the narrative how much she had suffered and portraying her as the aggressor: "I simply become an agitator affecting the man's life, no more, no less" (McEwan, 2015).

In July 2016, Richards (2016) tweeted and pinned to her timeline, so that it was at the top and visible first to all readers, the message "I've been focusing on living a #shamefree life". Notwithstanding, the profile and this specific tweet still had interactions referring to #Donglegate. For example, in 2021, user A1 replied to the pinned tweet, making fun of the fact that Richards had lost her job because of a tweet. Since 2016, Richards' Twitter account, which has almost 13,000 followers, including Barack Obama, has remained inactive.

The following year, Wired magazine journalist Laurent Hrybyk (2017) tried to interview Richards. Richards refused. She did not trust journalists anymore and she stated that "...she's trying to move on from what happened four years ago, and that she's spent years trying to find a way to earn a living, and that '[she doesn't] want to be the person where there's a car accident on the side of the road and people sit and gawk'".

6. Process and Elements

The cases narrated above represent the type of shaming that is the subject of this dissertation. The question now is, then, what do they have in common that characterizes this unique kind of phenomenon? What characteristics differentiate (or not) these from other similar cases of sociological and criminological phenomena, digital or not, like cyberbullying, revenge porn, political criticism, lynching, the pillory, a criminal court, and other processes that people

also call cancellations? To better understand and characterize this phenomenon, I will use the five cases to construct a step-by-step description of its development, in all its phases. I will also consider how the literature has described this process, especially the works of Marwick (2021, 2023) and Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021).

6.1. Process

The five cases, if not identical, have very similar ways of developing. Within this development, some elements repeatedly appear, while others vary. By observing the cases, it is possible to highlight the following development: [i] in a certain context, [ii] someone [iii] does something; [iv] this act becomes publicly known [v] and attracts mass reaction [vi] by multiple actors [vii] via social media [viii] because the fact is somehow perceived as outrageous, but it also attracts other emotions such as pleasure and humour. [ix] The reaction consists of an attack on the act and the person and third parties who associate with the person. [x] This mass reaction generates consequences for the person and [xi] for third parties.

For example, as it is visible in the case of Justine Sacco, on a [i] slow Friday and in racially charged environment, [ii] Sacco [iii] tweeted a joke about AIDS and Africa, [iv] which became publicly known through her own Twitter and by Sam Biddle's retweet [v], attracting mass reaction of [vi] morally interested individuals, NGOs, for-profit companies and others [vii] via Twitter, [viii] because the fact was perceived as racist, causing outrage and a flood of jokes and memes. [ix] The reaction consisted of cursing, criticizing, doxxing, threatening and ridiculing Sacco, condemning the joke, and pressuring the employer. [x] This mass reaction generated consequences for Sacco, who was fired, and [xi] unwanted attention to her employer, IAC.

In the next sections, I will examine these eleven elements, reaching a better description of the process of online public shaming.

6.2. Elements of Online Public Shaming

i – Context

What is the importance of the context in cases such as these? In all five, the context in which the online shamings happened varied enormously, and, in some, it directly fueled the shaming. By *context*, I mean the socio-cultural environment surrounding the case, at that time and place. It goes from the immediate context surrounding the facts to the larger societal picture at that moment.

Indeed, starting with Sacco, her tweet was posted on a “slow Friday” for journalists, who, perhaps due to a lack of better stories, began to magnify the case. When I began this thesis, I considered this a neutral, non-conflictual news environment in which the scarcity and need for stories helped the media pick up Sacco’s case. Nonetheless, as I found out later, the context was extremely tense in America: in 2013, Black Twitter was highly active online, using the platform to advance racial justice (Clark, 2020). Indeed, George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin’s killer, was acquitted in the summer of that year, and several celebrities were criticized for racist statements and actions. Sacco’s case happened, then, in a charged racial context.

The context for Amy Cooper was similarly tense. Amy Cooper, on that day of all days, threatened to call the police on a black man on the same day that a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd. Rowling, in her turn, published her tweet when England had a heightened interest in trans issues, especially in relation to youth, due to the public scrutiny of the UK Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) clinic for youth since the 2010s (Osserman, 2024). Richards, on the other hand, was a black woman posting about white men in a culture that is often misogynistic and anti-feminist (Jane, 2016; Massanari, 2017), and five years before the #MeToo movement. In 2012, when Stone took her picture at the Arlington Memorial, it had been

less than a year since the US troops had left Iraq, and there were still troops in Afghanistan. Context mattered in these cases, allowing them to happen and gain momentum. These online shamings found ground in the larger cultural context, as well as among people who were outraged and willing to move the topics forward. In three of these cases – Cooper, Sacco, and Rowling – there was serious social agitation at the time related to the themes involved in their wrongdoing. In the other two, even though there were no specific agitating social events, serious social issues were underlying the online shamings' context. As I will show while examining Sacco's case in more detail, the presence of this context is highly consequential for the analysis: it allows for the interpretation that shamings are not only individualized instances of punishment but also larger political projects for changing society's rules.

ii – Shamed Person

In the five cases, a specific individual or a couple of individuals were the target of the mass reaction.

Indeed, the social outrage targets an identifiable, specific person. The subjects of the cases were neither a group with certain characteristics (e.g., people of colour or of Arab origin, or those who profess Catholicism), nor a group that has certain habits or practices (e.g., drinking, smoking, doing yoga). Likewise, there are no cases of online shaming a company, an association, a club, or a body of government. So far, then, in this research, shamings are a phenomenon that impacts individuals who can be specifically identified. Cancelling Russia for invading Ukraine, therefore, does not fit the definition of this type of phenomenon.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that these targets are people, not objects, such as works of art. For example, HBO took *Gone with the Wind* out of its catalogue over accusations of racial prejudice (BBC, 2020), and the administrator of Dr. Seuss' literary estate decided to stop

publishing five of the author's books due to their racist imagery (CBC Kids News, 2021). Even though these cases might be popularly referred to as cancellations or as cases of cancel culture, they are not the phenomena specifically observed here. In online public shamings, as defined here, people are the center of the ordeal. As I will show later, the fact that only individuals are the target of online public shamings has an echo in the content of the reaction (element [ix]), for it is not only the outrageous act that people react against, but also against the shamed person herself. The individual is shamed and their misdeed is criticized.

In three of the cases, the shamed person was completely publicly unknown and had very little media presence. After the shamings, their names and identities became well known (except, perhaps, Schuh, whose image was never published). Richards, on the other hand, had a significant internet presence, and Rowling is a media juggernaut. The PlayHaven engineer who was fired is an interesting exception: despite his picture being the central issue of #Donglegate, he managed to keep his identity almost anonymous (though his name is findable online); moreover, even though the size of his media presence is unknown, this engineer expressed himself efficiently through a community forum (Hacker News). As I will show further on, this might have affected the consequences and responses of both Richards and the engineer. For now, it is possible to conclude that people with different levels of media presence, both famous and anonymous, are subject to shamings, but maybe with different results.

iii – Criticized Fact

In all these cases, there is a reaction to a *specific act* committed by a certain person (the shamed). Indeed, once the shaming happens, the shamed person's past is scrutinized for more misdeeds. However, the shaming, in these cases, happened due to a single act, enough to cause outrage. In the cases of , Sacco, Stone, and Richards all that was necessary was a social media

post; Amy Cooper only had to pick a fight in the park. Rowling's case is an exception. Her misdeeds happened in a crescendo, starting with occasional anti trans-rights online "likes" that were excused as mistakes. However, a tweet by Rowling ultimately revealed that there were no mistakes: her anti-trans opinions were fully her own. Even so, Rowling's incidents that can be clustered together, because of their type of offence and because they all happened in the same context over a two-year period, culminating in a main event that confirmed her views. The events are well-identified and circumscribed.

The cases, in this way, do not include the cancellation of systems of ideas, theories or cultural practices in themselves. Systems of ideas, theories and cultural practices, differently from these cases, have no specific act or individual to be shamed or criticized. For example, one can criticize the practice of blackface, or Nazi ideology, but it does not make sense to cancel these practices like in the cases examined here. On the other hand, shaming someone for practicing blackface or for defending Nazi ideas fits in this phenomenon. Indeed, Rowling is the best example.

The point is, then, that shamings in these cases involve specific factual events or clusters of factual events, attracting the reaction of the shamers.

On the other hand, Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia state that online shaming starts when "a person uses social media to publicly deride another person's moral character as having a feature that renders that character, in the shamer's view, as transgressive" (p. 6). The authors do not associate shaming with wrongdoing but with an attack on the person themselves; the wrongdoing, for them, is only an example of the faulty character: "the incitement to act in this way is pinned to a specific norm transgression by the target (though not necessarily illegal ones)

which is treated as evidence of the morally faulty character that renders the target excludable” (p. 7).

Marwick (2021) also puts more emphasis on the attack of the person for some of their characteristics, the wrongdoing being merely a justification for the attacks: “Networked harassment ... typically begins by identifying one or more norm violations (the accusation) and tying it to a specific person, brand, or organization (the target), *together creating a justification for harassment*” (p. 5, my emphasis). Marwick (2023) understands that harassment happens because of the group’s prejudices against a certain person, who is usually a visible minority, such as a woman, non-binary person, or person of colour. For Marwick, the identification of a wrongdoing is a constructed justification for the harassment. The example she uses to draw this conclusion develops slightly differently from mine: Marwick narrates the case of Nicole, an influencer who built an online following as a body-image advocate. Nicole attracted online hate in her social media channels, which got worse as she gained more notoriety and business deals from her work. The harassment got worse when she was targeted by an already existing online hate community, the *r/fatpeoplehate* SubReddit. In this forum, the attackers rationalized their harassment using Nicole’s behaviour: she should not expose herself; she is making money out of unhealthy behaviours. In this way, the attribution of a wrongdoing is just a façade for prejudice:

[Nicole’s] harassers have constructed an elaborate justification for attacking her that they frame in moral terms—that she is dishonest, promoting unhealthy living, and somehow scamming her Patreon subscribers. This allows them to justify their behavior.

....

Misogyny, racism, fatphobia, and other prejudices can be justified through an elaborate scaffolding of violations of morality. Members of the Fat People Hate subreddit need to consider themselves good people, so rather than admit they harass people for being fat, they construct a moral justification for their hateful targeting of Nicole on the basis of health and financial integrity (A. E. Marwick, 2023, pp. 120–122).

In this way, even though the wrongdoing is part of the phenomenon, for Marwick (2021, 2023), it is a mere justification for the online harassment – the author does not see in it a real and legitimate fight for justice.

As can be seen in the cases exposed here, it is true that there is an attack on the person as a whole, as who they are: Twitter and 4Chan users do not stop short of criticizing Richards for what she did, they also criticize and curse *her*: Richards is a bitch (user A3) and a feminazi (user A4), for example. The question is, then: is it necessary for a wrongdoing to occur for an online public shaming to take place, or is it possible to simply attack the individual or even use some isolated fact as mere justification for it?

When selecting the cases to be analyzed in this chapter, one of the possibilities was the case of Taylor Dumpson (2017) – which challenged this very problem of having an identified wrongdoing to trigger a shaming. As reported by Padilla (2019), Dumpson, who is black, became the president of the American University’s student body on April 30, 2017. The following day, bananas hanging from nooses were spread around campus. After the incident made the news, a neo-Nazi website, The neo-Nazi *Daily Stormer* website, published by Andrew Anglin, doxxed Dumpson and encouraged its readers to harass her. This led to a “troll storm” full of threats and racist comments against Dumpson. In this case, I was unable to identify something the attackers labelled as wrongdoing. They seemed to attack Dumpson as a black woman, without much reprehension about a specific act. Therefore, because Dumpson’s case had no identifiable wrongdoing by Dumpson, I decided not to use it to delineate the phenomenon.

Dumpson’s case was something different from the cases of Cooper, Sacco, Stone Richards or Rowling: *online hate speech*. Indeed, if someone is the victim of online hate speech, the development of the case would be different: it is hard to imagine someone being fired or

apologizing for being the victim of online hate speech. The same can be said about a body-positivity influencer: why would they lose contracts and sponsors because of online fatphobia? Or why would they apologize? In shamings, attributing wrongdoing to someone is essential to pressure employers and business partners to cut ties with the person; the person's reaction – with apologies or resistance, is also an integral part of the process. As it will be clear with Sacco's case, nonetheless, what starts with wrongdoing continues with personal attacks and hate speech: it is a shaming process, after all, in which the person as a whole is attacked. Therefore, even though the two phenomena are different, they have overlapping areas.

The cases used here also reveal a different perspective from Marwick's (2023) characterization: the women involved in these cases had not previously experienced online harassment, and three of them (Cooper, Sacco, and Stone) were completely unknown, private individuals. The online shaming started *because of* the wrongdoing. It is also hard to affirm, in these cases, that the initial incidents were mere justifications for online hate: in my six years presenting this research to various audiences, I still need to meet one person who does not at least wince when presented with Sacco's tweet. As I will show in Chapter 6, Sacco's tweet directly affected the value of equal respect for Black people at a time when racial tensions were elevated in the United States due to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman.

Following the criminological tradition of social reaction theories, as I will do in Chapter 3, individuals and groups create deviance according to their interests, including moral interests or the desire to maintain group relevance within society (Becker, 1963). In this way, deviance is always created by someone, and is not something intrinsic to an act. When Marwick (2021, 2023) points out that the wrongdoing in Nicole's case is something constructed – well, that is what deviance is. How this deviance relates to prejudice and hate is a complex process that may

occur in varied ways: hate might find justification in deviance; perceived deviance might lead to online hate. Either way, deviance is constructed, a wrongdoing is pointed out, and a rule starts to be enforced.

To be clear: when the cancellers have no targeted wrongdoing, and are only attacking an individual, it is a case of *hate speech*. That is not the subject of the present dissertation. On the other hand, shamers might target an individual for their characteristics and see in them wrongdoings to be attacked (Marwick's (2023) description) or identify a wrongdoing and then attack the wrongdoing as well as the person – in both cases, there is a shaming. My difference from Marwick is that I do not assume that perceived wrongdoing is merely a moral justification for online attacks that have other, “objective” reasons. I will return to this issue later in this chapter.

iv – Publicization

Publicization is the way in which these cases caught the attention of the larger public. It is an important aspect of all of them. However, one must notice two different moments in the publicization process: (1) when the information about the criticized fact is made available to the public, and (2) when the information goes beyond the original context. Indeed, lots of information with the potential to cause outrage is published every day, but only some of it goes viral and achieves mass reaction. As it is visible, a successful shaming involves not only that a fact is made public, but also that it is catapulted to the masses of internet users. As I will further show, a shaming needs the participation of people outside the original context, people with no direct connections to the people who are involved at first. For that to happen, the information must travel beyond that initial small circle.

In the cases observed, publication and spread beyond the original context sometimes occurred separately. The clearest example is Stone's case, whose Arlington Memorial picture only went viral one month after being posted on Facebook. In Rowling's case, the two events – publishing and going viral – happened at the same time; in Richards' case, it is not clear when the viral event occurred.

In most cases, the event was made available for the public by the shamed people themselves (Sacco, Stone, Rowling, Richards); in only one case was the publicization done by third parties (Cooper). These events all occurred on two social networking sites: Twitter and Facebook.

Apart from Stone, the cases became viral in a matter of days or even hours. In Sacco's case and Rowling's case, a specific event can be linked to them going viral: Rowling's tweet to her millions of followers and Sam Biddle's retweet of Sacco's tweet to his 15,000 followers. Cooper apparently became a mass sensation after Soledad O'Brien retweeted the Central Park video to hundreds of thousands of people, but this is not confirmed information. In these cases, it is possible to see exactly what Marwick (2021) refers to: "This accusation is promoted by one or many key accounts or network nodes, such as highly followed social media accounts or influencers (the amplifier). Often, but not always, the amplifier is in a different social network than the target" (p. 5).

In making cases viral, Cooper, Sacco and Rowling Sacco and show that a highly-connected node in the network helps in spreading the case across the internet. People with thousands of connections shared the fact to be criticized, bringing it to the masses.

Richard's case, finally, is difficult to explain. She herself had almost 10,000 followers, but there is no evidence that her original tweet went viral, or even that there was really a shaming of the

PlayHaven engineers. It is known, however, that one of them was fired because of the episode. Likewise, it is not exact when Richards herself started to be attacked. However, even though Richards had a large audience, the PlayHaven engineer found support in a very vigilant community. I do not have information on how the PlayHaven engineer's message went viral, but it is worth considering that, instead of a large following, a committed community might have played an important role in the shaming.

v – Mass Reaction

Reaction beyond the original context. In all the cases, there were attacks coming from a mass of people who were totally unrelated to the shamed people. Indeed, acquaintances, colleagues, friends and foes might join the shaming – after all, it was one of Sacco's 170 followers who emailed Biddle Sacco's AIDS joke. However, the main phenomena are the attacks from other people, who are unrelated to the shamed person, thanks to the internet's networked architecture. It is remarkable, for example, how Amy Cooper was identified in her shaming, since there was no relationship between Christian and Amy, and Amy's name was not on the original post – she is only identified as a "Karen". It was the sheer massiveness of the response that led Amy to be identified and to suffer consequences.

That means that a large public, unrelated to the original context, place and participants, actively gives their opinions, judges, shares and demands changes or punishments. That is different, then, from being attacked by a known public, connected to the person or the fact, by the place or the context. Unlike cyberbullying, for example, there is no relationship between most of the attackers and the victim². In the same sense, if the Republican Party takes away Liz

² In cyberbullying, kids from the same school also attack their colleagues online, in behaviour that, among other characteristics, involves a *power relation* (Slonje et al., 2013).

Cheney's leadership role, there is no shaming in the same being discussed here because all the actors – cancelled and cancellers, are part of the same, shared context of that political party. The same argument is valid for cases of students who file complaints against teachers on campus.

Thus, this is not a reaction by a closed group with access to the full context of a group member's misdeed, but a reaction by out-of-context people, based on what has been transmitted online.

Individual and collective reaction. Marwick (2021) refers to members of a platform who *individually* send ad hominem attacks to the target. Even though this happens and maybe it is the most important type of reaction, it is noticeable that users also act collectively within the phenomenon. As seen in Stone's case, for example, social media users gathered together in a Change.org petition requesting LIFE to fire her. Moreover, users engage in conversations via likes, retweets, replies, responses, Facebook groups, online communities in which they provide information to one another, share opinions, contrapose points of view and multiply popular messages. In this sense, my understanding of the phenomenon is substantially different from Marwick's. Alongside Ng (2022), online public shaming is constituted by all the discourses surrounding the case, not only the direct responses harassing the target. I return to this in the section *content of the reaction*, below.

vi - Who shames

In this section, I intend to advance the debate about shamings by examining *who their participants are*. By "participants," I mean those who collaborate in any way, either with or without the intention of attacking and shaming the wrongdoer. The current literature points to the participation of subaltern counterpublics (Clark, 2020), the state and the press (Trottier, 2018), content creators (R. Lewis & Christin, 2022), employers (Saint-Louis, 2021), regular social

media users (Bouvier, 2020; Trottier, 2018), and the online social media services (Han, 2023; R. Lewis & Christin, 2022; Tyson, 2022). I want to explore these categories, expand them, and experiment with a general explanation of who participates in shamings.

a. Networked Subaltern Counterpublics and Right-Wing Movements

A first perspective on the participants of online public shamings looks at grassroots groups. Indeed, one might understand shamings as processes through which more groups are allowed to participate in dispute during the process of deviance formation, allowing subaltern *counterpublics* (Fraser, 1994) to find a new online space to share experiences and culture and to voice their grievances (Clark, 2020; Graham & Smith, 2016). Fraser (1994) introduces the concept of counterpublics by criticizing Habermas' public sphere (2014) as a liberal, bourgeois, male space that excludes other marginalized publics, such as women from various classes and ethnicities. Fraser emphasizes the importance of counterpublics, that is, "...parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 67). Jackson, Bailey and Welles (2020) show how, even though marginalized counterpublics have always found forms of communication to create their politics, they "...have repurposed Twitter in particular to make identity-based cultural and political demands" (p. xxv).

To Clark (2020), *cancel culture* is about giving voice to marginalized groups to frame and point out social problems that would not be addressed in the larger public sphere. Social media would "allow marginalized groups to engage in networked framing ..., through the collective reasoning of culturally aligned online crowds (Clark, 2020, p. 89). This would be the case for Cooper, Sacco, and Rowling: reactions against racism and transphobia manifesting online. Certainly, the relationship between *cancellations* and counterpublics is also part of the

origins of these online movements. As Ng (2022, p. 49–52) explains, based on journalists Clyde McGrady and Aja Romano, the expression “to cancel someone” has origins in Black popular culture, and it started being used by Black Twitter (a network of progressive Black Americans on Twitter) in other situations, mainly inside its own realms, and in cases in which both the cancelled and the canceller were black.

With time, the expression "cancelling" spread throughout Twitter, becoming a powerful way of demanding accountability. At the same time, the term started losing its connection with communities of colour, being used by a larger public (Ng, 2022). Clark (2020) says that the expression “cancelling” has since been misappropriated by elites. Likewise, Day and Halborow (2021) state that “... the weaponisation of so-called cancel culture by those in positions of power is disturbing” (p. 29).

It is necessary to clarify that, despite its origins, what Clark (2020) refers to as “cancel culture” and here is referred to as online public shaming is currently not a practice exclusive to subaltern counterpublics. Some authors, unfortunately, mix the origins of the phenomenon with it being exclusive to progressive groups. Dyberg (2024), for example, states that the phenomenon, which he also calls cancel culture, “is a culture in the sense of forming part of *leftist* identitarianism” (p. 193 –emphasis added). To Dyberg, cancel culture is a practice usually used against racism and sexism, and in which any dissent is considered right-wing extremism. Besides, empirical research that shows that liberals are less prone to use the practices of online public shamings than their conservative counterparts (Cook *et al.*, 2021). Tyson (2022) states that shaming has conservative features when considering

“...its insistence on conformity, shaming, even when harnessed for ostensibly progressive ends... the American right... has an undeniable taste for public shaming. The right-wing Twitter account Libs of TikTok, for instance, has gained more than a million followers by holding up queer and trans people as objects of disgust” (Tyson, 2022, p. 126).

In this way, despite its counterpublic origins, cancel culture—or, more specifically, online public shaming—is today a practice of both sides of the political spectrum. It is important, however, to remember that, despite that fact, “...due to fundamental power differentials that privilege Whiteness and maleness, those who challenge these structures are more likely to face harassment, systematically removing minority voices from the public sphere” (A. E. Marwick, 2021, p. 2). Indeed, research shows that women, LGBTQ+ people, black people, Indigenous people and people with disabilities are the main targets of online hate (Joseph, 2022; UN Women, 2024). Scholars should be attentive, then, to the possibility that even progressive shamings might target mainly the minorities they supposedly champion.

Moreover, through the work of Trottier (2018), Bouvier (2019, 2020), Lewis and Christin (2022), Saint-Louis (2021), and Day and Halborow (2021), it is visible that the idealistic portrayal of shamings as moved by grassroots movements’ interests paints only a partial picture of the phenomenon. It leaves aside the participation of other actors whose interests are not the moral belief in the content of progressive rules but goals of visibility and profit. They are the object of the following sections.

b. Shaming as Assemblage? The State, the Traditional Media and Content Creators

Trottier (2018) poses another problem to the assertion that online public shamings are the work of counterpublics: for him, this type of phenomenon would be the work of an *assemblage*, “that include[s] private security cameras, police, public broadcasters, social media platforms, users and their devices” (p. 170). An assemblage, for Haggerty and Ericson (2000), based on Deleuze and Guattari, constitutes a phenomenon that is “part of the state form” and that, despite being usually approached as “bounded, structured, and stable,” is constituted by “an essentially limitless range of other phenomena such as people, signs, chemicals, knowledge and institutions.

To dig beneath the surface stability of any entity is to encounter a host of different phenomena and processes working in concert” (p. 608).

Trottier (2018) focuses on criminalized incidents that are also exposed online, in which the culprit is not only formally criminalized by the state but also shamed by social media users and the press. To the author,

Shaming is a social mechanism through which state and press-affiliated actors mobilize the public, either as a passive audience member or as an active participant providing personal details about—or condemnation of—a target. Yet through digital media, citizens are able to render shamed targets visible to a degree that may exceed the former’s understanding of ‘proportionality’, or the latter’s understanding of ‘public interest’ (Trottier, 2018, p. 179–180).

It is important to highlight, however, that unlike Trottier, I do not assume that the state and press are the leading actors in a shaming, or even that the state’s presence is necessary. In Sacco’s case, for example, the state presence is negligible and secondary, and the shaming does not aim at enhancing an official punishment. So, even though the idea of a “limitless range of other phenomena” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 608) is attractive, it would be inadequate to classify a shaming as an assemblage, considering the connection of this latter concept with the state form. The same can be said about Stone, Rowling, and Richards. Of all the cases, only Cooper had the participation of the state, through the police.

Bouvier (2019) also highlights how the traditional media plays a role in social media trends. With the advent of the new media landscape, traditional media have been challenged by the constant demand for updates and clicks. In this way, what is deemed newsworthy is influenced by what is trending online – trending itself indicates meaningfulness and cultural relevance.

Moreover, as the distinction between social and traditional media blurs, legacy media companies and social media platforms find mutual benefit in collaborating, according to Lewis and Christin (2022) citing Cunningham and Craig, 2017. Focusing on celebrity drama that takes

place on YouTube, they argue that what they call cancellations are a complex process involving traditional media, social media platforms, content creators and celebrities. The visibility of the topic—that is, the number of interactions, views, clicks and likes received by a certain story—drives the platform drama created around cancellations. This means that what content creators defend as moral or immoral might depend on the pushback they might receive from their audiences: “many creators felt that they were unable to produce videos that went against the prevailing opinions of their audiences, fearing backlash or low viewership numbers” (p. 1643).

In this way, Trottier (2018), Bouvier (2019) and Lewis and Christin (2022) show that, besides grassroots movements, the state, traditional media, social media platforms, content creators, and celebrities engage in shaming practices.

c. Employers and Business Partners

Another group of actors who must be considered in the shaming process is the shamed person’s employer and business partners—well represented in all cases except in Rowling’s. Saint-Louis (2021) differentiates “cancel culture”, which would be the acts of ostracising and shaming people online, from “cancelling”, which would be “an event where organisations censor, fire, or encourage celebrities or commoners to resign following a breach of social norms, mores, and taboos” (p. 4-5). Organizations and employers cut ties with the wrongdoer. This cut, however, is not due to ideological reasons but merely because of risk management: "Risk mitigation is an important motivation. Organisations do not cancel their members because of convictions. They do so to protect their reputations (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004) as a part of crisis management plans (Coombs, 2007)" (Saint-Louis, 2021, p. 8). In this way, it must be considered how mass online protests put power in the hands of employers to silence individuals

(Day & Halborow, 2021). One can consider shamings partly as a managerial practice through which companies administer risks.

d. Social Media Platforms

Finally, authors also point out how online public shaming processes also benefit social media platforms, as the shamings increase traffic and engagement:

The most popular social media sites are commercial platforms flooded with advertising and propaganda and run by black-box algorithms that exploit shaming campaigns to boost user engagement. Technology companies have handed us weapons of reputational damage that are invariably set to hair-trigger alert (Tyson, 2022, p. 127).

More than simply profiting from online public shamings, Han (2023) observes that these platforms have been designed to encourage outrage, so “unsurprisingly, user engagement is strongly driven by negative emotions such as anger or condemnation, which incentivises platforms to draw users’ attention to incendiary comments that generate backlash”(p. 169).

In conclusion, the scholarship points out several actors as participants in shamings: marginalized counterpublics, right-wing social media users, the traditional media, the state, content creators, celebrities, employers and businesses partners. I will develop, however, a broad definition of who shames, *beyond the enumeration of specific actors*. The authors reviewed here are mostly preoccupied with describing empirical findings and cases that, unfortunately, limit a larger concept of who shames. Trottier (2018) is the exception with the conception of assemblage. However, he ends up limiting the application of that concept by defining shamings as a movement *led* by and with the necessary participation of the state and the press, followed by social media users. As I will show, in Sacco’s case, a more extensive and flexible concept is necessary since unpredictable actors can participate in and even lead a shaming—as long as they are interested in it.

vii – Via Mass Self-communication

The online shamings happened via mass self-communication. As Castells (2015) defines it:

It is mass communication because it processes messages from many to many, with the potential of reaching a multiplicity of receivers, and of connecting to endless networks that transmit digitized information around the neighborhood or around the world. It is self-communication because the production of the message is autonomously decided by the sender, the designation of the receiver is self-directed and the retrieval of messages from the networks of communication is self-selected. Mass self-communication is based on horizontal networks of interactive communication that, by and large, are difficult to control by governments or corporations. (p. 27).

With mass self-communication, one person's actions have the potential to spread to millions of others. Moreover, the receivers can respond differently from a television audience, and this response also has a mass audience, spreading cross-messages endlessly. In this way, the attacks on Amy Cooper, for example, were possible because (1) the use of Facebook and Twitter by Christian and Melody Cooper; (2) the activity of multiple individual users in their ability to mass-self-communicate, spreading and criticizing her acts.

What differentiates these cases is the fact that the wrongdoing became known via mass self-communication, which also was how the reaction to it spread. In Cooper's example, the global visibility of the shared video and the possibility of a mass networked response by viewers were essential for her downfall. It is hard to imagine her words spreading so quickly and mobilizing so many without mass self-communication. On the other hand, Fabiane de Jesus' lynching in Brazil³ is an example of how mass self-communication played a role in an attack but occurring offline, it was a different one from the other shamings here.

³ According to journalist Diógenes Campanha (2014), of *Folha de São Paulo*, in 2014, the Facebook page "Guarujá Alerta," published a claim that, the city of Guarujá, a woman was kidnapping children to perform dark magic rituals. The suspect's sketch was also in the publication, portraying a blond woman (this portrait, as found out later, was of a suspect of a crime committed in Rio de Janeiro, in 2012). Fabiane de Jesus lived in Morrinhos, a neighbourhood of the city of Guarujá, with her husband and two children. She was bipolar and was having a crisis at the time. On Saturday morning, she left her house on a bicycle to pick up the Bible she had left at church. On her way

In that case, a Brazilian woman was murdered by lynching after a hoax about a witch who kidnapped children circulated on a local Facebook page. De Jesus was killed after a mob thought she looked like the sketch published on the page. Here, mass self-communication allowed the local community where Fabiane lived to fear the supposed witch. However, even though Facebook was used to spread a rumour, individuals did not use it to express their discontent and attack Fabiane. In sum, the wrongdoing was posted on that medium, but there was no use of mass self-communication to *react* to that behaviour. In the cases analyzed here, on the other hand, not only does the information about the fact arrive via mass self-communication, but also the reaction to the fact arrives via mass self-communication.

Therefore, here, mass self-communication is used to (1) publicize the action *and* (2) to allow multiple individuals to react to this action.

viii – Outrage, Pleasure and Humour

The criticized facts were the object of public outrage. That is, a significant part of the participants reacted because they understood the criticized fact as something unacceptably wrong. It was not merely a disagreement, but true shock in the face of an act that went against the shamers' values. And, indeed, each case can be linked to a different value or worldview and a corresponding threat to that value or worldview. Rowling threatened equality with her transphobia, Cooper and Sacco threatened racial equality with their racism, Stone threatened the

back, she stopped to buy bananas. The official version of the lynching is that she had offered a banana to a child, whose parents thought that Fabiana looked like the witch of Guarujá. This initiated the lynching. She was beaten to death by men, women and even children. The lynching was recorded on video by the locals with their cellphones. The images were shared online, and Fabiane's husband, older daughter and mother-in-law discovered that Fabiane had been beaten to death through internet images. The same videos were later used to convict five men for Fabiane's homicide. After the occurrence, the owner of the Facebook page "Guarujá Alerta", received death and lynching threats and virtual attacks. He left Guarujá and the social network. At the time, he gave an interview saying: "What makes me sad is to see people lynching our [Facebook page] team. They [the people] are doing to me what they did to her [Fabiane]".

honour and dignity of the war dead and veterans; the PlayHaven engineers were accused of sexism, and Richards overreacted to an offence and jeopardized a family's livelihood.

In this sense, the cases observed here are different from *laudatory* acts, which are present in charity work, noble gestures or captivating stories that go viral on the internet. Campaigns that use mass self-communication *only* to raise funds, such as the “Ice Bucket Challenge”⁴, are, then, a similar phenomenon to online shamings, but not the same subject. Neither are the viral stories with a pure comic appeal, such as the “David after dentist”⁵ YouTube Video (booba1234, 2009). These phenomena might depend on mass self-communication to be known and responded to—and might even refer to a certain person and fact—but they are not fueled by outrage.

Therefore, the subjects' behaviours cause outrage here. See, for example, Justine Sacco's Twitter feed less than a day after she posted a tweet considered racist:

[her Twitter feed]...had become a horror show. “In light of @Justine-Sacco disgusting racist tweet, I'm donating to @care today” and “How did @JustineSacco get a PR job?! Her level of racist ignorance belongs on Fox News. #AIDS can affect anyone!” and “I'm an IAC employee and I don't want @JustineSacco doing any communications on our behalf ever again. Ever.” [...] The anger soon turned to excitement: “All I want for Christmas is to see @JustineSacco's face when her plane lands and she checks her inbox/voicemail” and “Oh man, @JustineSacco is going to have the most painful phone-turning-on moment ever when her plane lands” and “We are about to watch this @JustineSacco bitch get fired. In REAL time. Before she even KNOWS she's getting fired”. (Ronson, 2015d)

In this way, the existence of a fact perceived as outrageously wrong is a necessary characteristic of shamings, which excludes many similar situations involving information technologies' viral capacity.

⁴ The “Ice Bucket Challenge” was a viral campaign which raised US\$220,000,000 for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) research in 2013: “To complete the challenge, people would dump a bucket of ice water over their heads and post the video to social media, challenging others to do the same or make a donation to ALS research. Often, people did both” (BBC News, 2020).

⁵ The “David after dentist” video shows seven-year-old David after a trip to the dentist. Due to the anesthesia, the boy's cognition is comically impaired, saying things such as “Is this real life?” It currently has 139,915,554 views video on YouTube alone (booba1234, 2009).

The necessary presence of outrage, however, does not exclude other emotions from online public shamings. As Bouvier (2020) and Bouvier and Machin (2021) state, citing Rambukkana (2015), social media users might be driven by the desire to share likable and shareable posts, leading them to opt for more extreme and outrageous content. Tyson (2022), on the other hand, understands that there is pleasure in an intertwining of righteousness and sadism: “Social-media shaming is atavistically pleasurable: it unfolds in real time, contains a real element of risk, and flatters our sense of power, making us feel superior to the person we are shaming” (p. 129). Marwick (2023) has the same perception. For her, “Moral outrage (...) feels good; it makes its perpetrators feel superior and shores up their sense of morality and identity” (p. 120).

Finally, it is important to highlight that the pleasure derived from an online public shaming is not only righteous – it is also amusing, humorous, carnivalesque. Some authors have briefly pointed out the importance of humour in online shaming (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). In Chapters 5 and 6, I will show how humour is not a side note in this phenomenon. To the contrary, humour and entertainment constitute a main type of discourse in the phenomenon, being merged, as in ancient public punishments, with violence and shame to form a celebration of deviance creation, in which the crowd amuses itself by the ridicule of the target. In cases like Sacco’s, it is even possible to talk about an online public shaming *party*.

ix - Content of the Reaction

Messaging the target, withdrawing attention, and commenting on the case. In relation to the reaction, Marwick (2021) says that “members of the amplifiers’ networked audience, who share an ideological or moral framework, individually send ad hominem attacks, insults, slurs, and in the worst cases, threats of death, rape, and violence to the accused (brigading, dogpiling, or ‘calling out’)” (p. 5). Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) go further and include in their

glossary of reactions communications that do not include the target, but are directed to them, besides calls for the target to be fired:

None of this need be legally defamatory, and the communication need not be with the target but can involve admonishments presented as communicating something to the target. Initial attacks can include, for instance, broadcasting footage of some behaviour deemed objectionable or retweeting a remark to one's followers with a call for repercussions. Where successful, such incitement rallies an angry cyber mob of other internet users, directing an escalating wave of derision, ridicule, or abuse at the target. Some of the communication here can escalate to calls for scrutiny of the target, her position, location, job, relations, personal life, and life of associates. Sometimes there is a call to exact retribution beyond social media derision, e.g., for the person's employer to be informed of her transgression with the aim of jeopardising her job (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021, p. 7).

Similarly, Ng (2022) includes in cancellations both *cancel practices* or *cancelling* and *cancel discourses*. While cancelling practices involve social media posts indicating the target has been cancelled, as well as withdrawal of attention, resources, employment, contracts, etc.,

Cancel discourses are discussions and commentary about cancel practices and their aftermath. Some cancel discourses, which can be thought of as "first-order" (cancel) discourses, occur on the same platform as the one where the original cancelling occurred; for example, a user retweeting a cancel tweet and adding their own comment to it (whether they are supporting or challenging the cancelling). Other (second-order) cancel discourses emerge outside of the digital spaces where the cancelling originated; news reports about the social media outrage to BTS's Van Fleet award speech, for instance, or blog posts about cancelling events (Ng, 2022, p. 5).

It is possible to see that the three authors present different levels of reaction content: from (1) the responses and attacks directed solely to the target (A. E. Marwick, 2021) to an encompassing definition that also includes (2) support to the attacks (via, for example, retweets), requests for third parties to act, the actions of third parties that affect the target, and (3) reporting and commenting the case (Ng, 2022).

In this aspect, I follow Ng's encompassing conception of the phenomenon, that includes levels from direct reactions to commentaries on the case. Firstly, the reactions described by Marwick (2021) must be included: they are the primary reactions to the target that create the basis of the online shaming. Secondly, the calls for third parties to somehow punish the target, by withdrawing resources are included: these are actions demanded by the outraged public and

imposed by employers, companies and governments pressured by the online reaction. To authors like Saint-Louis (2021), this is such an important part of the process that it is itself “the act of cancellation (or cancelling), the active element of cancel culture, as an event where organisations censor, fire, or encourage celebrities or commoners to resign following a breach of social norms, mores, and taboos” (pp. 4-5). Others, like Ng (2022) and Clark (2020) also give special attention to the acts of withdrawing attention and resources from the shamed person. As is visible in the cases presented, the call for action by employers and business partners is an important strategy employed by online attackers, through which they are able to impose embodied consequences upon the target.

Finally, the social commentary and the reporting on the case. As I intend to demonstrate in Chapter 5, informative discourse is an important part of the conversations in a shaming: social media users exchange information among themselves about the facts and the wrongdoer, while traditional media publish about the fact, making it gain more attention inside and outside the initial platform. It is essential to notice that these lateral conversations enlarge the shaming process beyond its original borders. More than that, however, as I will show in Chapter 6, commenting and reporting on the targets and their wrongdoing helps *constitute them as outsiders and the process itself as a powerful tool to create and enforce rules*.

In this way, the reaction includes not only direct communication with the shamed person, but also calls for action to third parties, reporting on the case, and conversations among users about it.

Reacting to the wrongdoing and to the wrongdoer. Moreover, it is also important to notice that the reaction’s content reflects an absolute attack not only against the fact perceived as

outrageous but also against the shamed person, as pointed out by Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) and Marwick (2021).

All the cases' reactions contain criticism of the facts. Some, for example, criticized Sacco's tweet for not specifying where in Africa she was going; journalist Soledad O'Brien explained that Amy's phone call to the police was putting Christian's life in danger. The outrage in relation to the fact might call attention to a larger problem, such as racism, AIDS in Africa, transphobia, a lack of respect for the war dead, misogyny, and oversensitive feminism. The awareness generated, in some cases, brings up charity (e.g., donate to fight AIDS in Africa) or for-profit campaigns (the Body Works tote bag on menstruation) into the discussion.

Attacking the *person* is another component of the reactions, nonetheless. When attacking the person, shamers not only refer to the outrageous fact but also go beyond it and beyond the measure in which the shamed person is responsible for it. In this way, curses, threats, doxxing, and demands to shut up or to commit suicide become part of the reaction. It is very peculiar, in this way, that the past life of the shamed is thoroughly researched: despite being unrelated to the criticized fact, past misdeeds confirm the shamed's wickedness (Sacco, Cooper) or hypocrisy (Richards).

At this point, everything related to the shamed is perceived as representative of their acts. Any ties to the shamed must be severed: Cooper must return her dog; Sacco must not be rehired; Stone must be fired; any actors from the Harry Potter franchise must take a stand against J.K. Rowling; SendGrid, its employees, and customers will be targeted if Richards is not removed. Therefore, the intention of the reaction is to separate the shamed from all their connections, to punish those who insist on supporting the shamed, who is now absolutely identified and reduced

to the criticized fact. A shaming is a critique of a fact seen as wrong, but it is also the reduction of the shamed person to this act.

x – Consequences for the Shamed Person

The consequences suffered by the shamed person were very similar in the cases of Cooper, Sacco, Stone and Richards; the consequences upon Rowling, however, must be differentiated.

In four cases (Cooper, Sacco, Stone/ Schuh, and Richards/PlayHaven Engineer), the shamed people lost their jobs. This was demanded by the shamers and happened very fast: except for Stone/ Schuh, the firings happened in less than 48 hours after the publishing of the fact.

Moreover, Richards and Cooper had to leave their houses due to threats they received. Cooper left the country, and Richards spent one year couch-surfing without a fixed address. In the opposite direction, Stone spent one year hardly leaving her house. The psychological toll, indeed, seems to be one of the biggest consequences to the shamed: they were slurred and cursed, threatened with death and rape, had pictures attached to pornographic images. It is no wonder that Sacco says that she cried her own weight in tears; nor that Stone obsessed about everything said about her and sat by her kitchen table for a year, and, when she finally got a new job, that she dreaded telling her employers her story (Ronson, 2016). Cooper, one year after the Central Park incident, was still afraid of getting out of the house to take her dog Henry for a walk: every time a stranger approached to pet the dog, she wondered if the person would recognize her (Weiss, 2021). Richards, in the year following her shaming, said she was feeling frustrated and afraid; she did not feel safe continueing to talk about the issue (McEwan, 2015).

Richards' statement is telling: she was too afraid to continue talking about it. Even though she had tried to live #shamefree, eventually she stopped using Twitter and refused interviews, simply trying to leave the incident behind, rebuild her name, and make a living. The same happened to Sacco: she deleted her Twitter account and, when Ronson asked for another interview, she refused: she had to move on with her life and not draw more attention to herself (Ronson, 2016).

Cooper, Sacco and Stone all issued apologies, deleted posts and profiles, owning the mistake pointed out by the shamers – even though in later interviews all of them stated that they did not agree with the shamers' interpretation of the facts. That is: even when not agreeing, the shamed, in order to de-escalate the shaming and/or disappear from the public eye, in order to rebuild their life, had decided to silence any counter-narrative. As stated by Marwick (2021), "Frequently, harassment results in the accused self-censoring. As a result, networked harassment becomes a regulating force for speech on social media" (p. 2). Han (2023) also believes that cancel culture stifles free speech, creating a "public monoculture" (p. 171), undermining the exchange of ideas and individual autonomy.

Nonetheless, not all the targets in the case remained silent. Engineer mr-hank effectively placed his narrative as the preferred one, thanks to the tech community. He apologized, but he turned the tide against Richards. Rowling, similarly, never silenced her views, and even wrote a letter defending freedom of speech. Unlike mr-hank, however, she was able to do so because of her enormous fame and wealth. It is important to remain cautious when affirming that online public shaming stifles free speech: cases like Rowling's show that, depending on the positions of power, the target is very well able to continue manifesting in public. As criticized by Day and Halborow (2021):

For instance, the July 2020 “Letter on Open Justice and Debate” published in *Harper’s* was ostensibly a takedown of the trend in the media towards “ideological conformity” and a warning against the censoring effects of cancel culture on popular debate. However, it was signed by over 150 notable celebrities [including Rowling] and published on the pages of a widely read, established magazine. Though the raising of the question is not, in itself, a problem, one could ask where exactly the threat of censorship arose in this case. Furthermore, the weaponisation of so-called cancel culture by those in positions of power is disturbing. When Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, opines on cancel culture at a congressional hearing, he is addressing the criticisms levelled at him online for his corporations’ eye-watering abuse of workers globally. Bezos’ wealth and power effectively shield him from the repercussions of any of his actions, which extend to far worse than expressing himself online (Day & Halborow, 2021, p. 29).

xi – Consequences to Third Parties

Finally, a shaming might affect not only the shamed, but also those associated with them. In these cases, I have observed mainly pressure, threats and consequences to the employer of the shamed, but not as much to family, friends and supporters. This does not exclude, of course, further findings.

Primarily, employers face pressure to fire the individual who has been shamed (Franklyn Templeton for Cooper, IAC for Sacco, LIFE in the case of Stone and Schuh, and SendGrid for Richards). In some cases, the pressure comes from the potential reputational damage for the company, but in others, it comes through direct attacks, like the Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyberattack suffered by SendGrid.

As is visible, there is the shamers’ pressure for the employer to distance itself from the shamed, to show that the company abhors that type of behaviour, and, moreover, to punish the shamed by taking away their livelihood. In all cases, except Rowling’s, firing the person was a demand that none of the companies involved refused.

7. Nomenclature and Definitions

The phenomenon studied here is scarcely the object of scientific investigation and definition, and, still, has accumulated a varied nomenclature. Cook et al. (2021) call *cancel*

culture an “umbrella term” that is used when “anger is directed toward removing collective support of someone or trying to make a group effort to diminish an individual” (p. 2). Clark (2020) uses a similar definition, of withdrawing attention from someone: “...‘canceling’ is an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one’s attention from someone or something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money” (p. 89).

Ng (2022), in turn, defines cancel culture through its practices (or “cancelling”) and discourses. For the author, cancel practices might

... revolve around media, including social media posts, both those that explicitly use the term ‘cancelled’ ... or posts that mean the same thing ... Other cancel practices involve withdrawing public support from the cancel target, such as unfollowing them on social media, no longer buying the brands in question or those promoted by a targeted celebrity, no longer watching the television/films or listening to the music they are associated with, and so on. At the institutional level, cancel practices may involve literal cancelling, such as networks cancelling television shows (or series or films in the works) of stars who have behaved problematically. Corporations may completely terminate their public associations with cancelled targets... conversely, celebrities may terminate their sponsorship agreements with companies deemed problematic. State-level actors may also be involved in cancel practices, such as the PRC government’s ban on Lady Gaga performing in mainland China after she met with the Dalai Lama in 2016. Employers may terminate employees, whether for famous celebrities ... (Ng, 2022, p. 5)

Furthermore, for Ng (2022) “Cancel discourses are discussions and commentary about cancel practices and their aftermath”, either on the same social media platform where the cancelling happens (which Ng calls “first-order cancel discourse”), as with retweets of the cancelling, agreeing or disagreeing with it, or in other online spaces (“second-order cancel discourse”). It is worth noting that Ng explicitly disassociates the term from any specific political affiliation.

That is an important observation since the terms “cancel culture”, “cancellation” or “cancelling” are polarizing. As summarized by Day and Halborow (2021), “Cancel culture usually carries a negative connotation. ...it is one of those terms used most by those who do not like it, and has become a shorthand for everything that conservatives dislike.” (p. 29). Clark

(2020) makes a similar observation, contextualizing and historicizing this polarization. The author explains that cancelling is one of the many accountability discursive practices of the Black American counterpublic, such as reading, dragging and calling out. Actually, as Ng (2022) exposes, even the expression “to cancel” has origins in Black popular media: the first use of the term in the sense of rejecting someone (and not cancelling a product) is from Chic’s song, “Your Love Is Cancelled”. The expression was used after that in other songs, movies and TV shows, until it started being used by Black Twitter. There, the expression “cancelling” became associated with the other Black discursive practices: “As such, the tweets are tied to other Black interactional practices involving one-upping other conversational participants, such as dissing, in that the suggestions for what was deemed cancel-worthy were intentionally hyperbolic for humorous effect, and performed for an in-group audience” (p. 51). Despite the Black American origins of the discursive practice and the expression, Clark (2020) observes that:

The reference was subsequently seized upon by outside observers, particularly journalists with an outsized ability to amplify the(ir own) white gaze. Politicians, pundits, celebrities, academics, and everyday people alike have narrativized being canceled into a moral panic akin to actual harm, adding a neologic twist on the origin of the practice by associating it with an unfounded fear of censorship and silencing. But being canceled—a designation, it should be noted, usually reserved for celebrities, brands, and otherwise out-of-reach figures—should be read as a last-ditch appeal for justice. (Clark, 2020, p. 89)

Dyrberg (2024) points out that, for some, since the focus is on the responsibility of powerful people, the preferable term would be “consequence culture” or “accountability culture”. He, in turn, has his own critique of this nomenclature:

The point is to legitimize canceling by claiming that it only calls out those who have wronged others – hence the emphasis on accountability/consequence culture. The point is moreover to illustrate that reactions against this scrutiny of the powerful are illegitimate, as they form part of a reactionary and racist ‘cultural backlash’. So, canceling always hits the right target, and criticism is always off-target by construction. (Dyrberg, 2024, p. 197)

Tyson (2022) also criticizes the expressions “cancel culture” and “consequence culture” and their characterization as accountability, in a middle ground between Clark (2020) and

Dyrberg (2024): “What is decried as ‘cancel culture’ is sometimes just spirited criticism; what is endorsed as ‘accountability’ is sometimes gratuitous and cruel” (p. 122). Tyson also criticizes the characterization of the phenomenon as *public* since the platforms on which these cases happen are owned by private companies that profit from the humiliation of an individual. To Tyson, “What we have today is a Theater of Shame: participatory spectacles in which members of the audience are (virtually) hauled onstage and made to answer for their sins” (p. 126). Tyson, in this way, associates cancellations with ancient spectacles of shaming punishments:

The feature that unites these penalties is the exhibition of the offender to the public. Shame punishments are a kind of theater in which the suffering is real and the audience is encouraged to participate. At their core is the agony of coerced display. Humiliating costumes and props or various forms of disfigurement (a shaved head, a sliced-off ear, an insignia carved into the forehead) underscore the kinship between shaming rituals and the structure of drama. Public shaming is one of humanity’s most revealing categories of spectacle, a radical form of theater in which the community expresses its moral views by inflicting real injuries (Tyson, 2022, p. 124)

Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) also highlight the importance of shame in the phenomenon, which they call *online public shaming* (OPS). They define public shaming as “... a communicative social practice in which people are framed publicly as being outside of the community of morally acceptable persons, however they feel about it” (p. 10). Differently from Tyson, they understand the phenomenon to be a public act, despite the fact that the platforms are private:

It is important to note that this act is public, both in the sense that it is open to public participation without presupposing any personal relationship with the target, and its aim is for society (in the sense of the public) to collectively impose the sanction on the target of exclusion from equal treatment in these relations: a collective public shunning, for having the moral character they do (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021, p. 8)

Marwick (2021), in turn, prefers the expression *morally motivated networked harassment*. The author creates a model to understand the phenomenon as a form of rule enforcement through shaming and humiliation. She explains that “the moral violations named in the accusation position the accused as deviant because their behavior violates group norms” (p.

3). In relation to the term *harassment*, the author points out that it can encompass many meanings, “anything from a single instance of name-calling to persistent, serious abuse” (p. 2). In her taxonomy, nonetheless, *networked harassment* happens when “an individual is harassed by a group of people connected by social media” (p. 2). The author, furthermore, believes that there is an advantage in using *harassment* because most of the literature that addresses the matter is feminist scholarship, since women and nonbinary people are the main targets of it.

In this work, I will be using the expression *online public shaming*. Firstly, I aim to avoid the problems with the expressions “cancel culture”, “cancellation” and “cancelling”. These are expressions associated with Black American discursive and cultural practices, and although the expressions do justice to part of the origins of the phenomenon, I find it would be a contradiction to use them to address cases such as Richards’, in which racism against the shamed is a factor. Secondly, as I have shown in Chapter 1, the expression is popularly used to refer to numerous situations that are not necessarily the phenomenon studied here, muddying the waters for any precise classification. That is made worse by the fact that the term is also used by conservative and right-wing groups to criticize progressive activism.

Thirdly, the term “cancellation”, in itself, does not adequately describe the phenomenon. Considering the popular meaning of the word, of unsubscribing from a service, “cancellation” would make sense for authors such as Clark (2020), who define cancellations as withdrawing support and attention from someone. However, the cases show that the phenomenon under study might involve the withdrawal of resources (most significantly, employment), but that is far from meaning a withdrawal of attention. To the contrary, during the shaming, the shamed person receives an *excess* of attention. The online audience’s attention is turned towards the wrongdoer, who is the target of thousands of messages, attacks, memes, news articles, fake online profiles,

doxxing and threats. In this way, definitions such as Clark's (2020), for whom to cancel means the choice of withdrawing attention, are a very partial perspective of the phenomenon. By equating cancelling with withdrawing support, such a definition has three problems. (1) It focuses on the cancellation of celebrities and organizations, which indeed have sponsorships and contracts cancelled because of the polemic. Indeed, Clark states that "cancelling" is "usually reserved for celebrities, brands, and otherwise out-of-reach figures" (p. 89). Nonetheless, as the cases demonstrate, the phenomenon reaches both celebrities and unknown people. (2) The nomenclature also leaves aside the important fact that the shaming brings *more* attention to the shamed. Even in the cases of celebrities, as J.K. Rowling, an important part of the phenomenon is to curse her, argue against her views, publish her address online, actively demand her dismissal and boycott. To those who are private people, the shaming actually makes them sudden public personas. Clark's definition and nomenclature, in this way, portray the phenomenon as almost passive, in which social media users simply unfollow someone or stop listening, while the cases presented show a reality in which the imposition of shame and violence are as much as, or even more important than, unfollowing.

Finally, (3) Clark's nomenclature and definition intrinsically associate cancellations with minorities' fight for adequate justice, especially considering the origins of the term in Black discursive practices. For the author, the "colorful and descriptive language" (p. 89) of cancellations is, in this way, justifiable, since "Not every critique can come wrapped up in niceties and polite speech. Nor should it. Sometimes, the urgency and weight of oppression require us to immediately cry out" (p. 89). In this way, Clark associates cancellations with the accountability of the powerful to the powerless, understanding it as a *positive* process. However, not all shamings are the manifestation of a progressive cause expressed by a minority: shamings

work very well for conservative causes and as well as to spread racism and misogyny. In this way, unlike Clark, I neither assume shamings to be essentially positive nor to be the product of a marginalized public.

In relation to *morally motivated networked harassment* (MMNH), proposed by Marwick (2021, 2023), a few observations must be made, both in relation to the nomenclature and to the concept. Firstly, it is necessary to recognize the advantage of the use of the term *harassment*: it includes both momentary actions, such as name-calling, and more persistent ones, like cyberstalking. It has the advantage, then, of encompassing the many strategies used in the phenomena. Nonetheless, as Marwick observes, *harassment* implies that there is a harasser and a harassed, or a perpetrator and a victim. As Marwick says, “The word itself makes clear who is the *good* guy and who is *bad*; it imparts a moral judgment that can reduce complex issues of accountability to black and white” (A. E. Marwick, 2023, p. 105 - my emphasis). In Marwick’s work, such a black and white dichotomy makes sense, since she is studying online harassment and she focuses on how this harassment mainly targets women, people of colour and non-binary people. In Marwick’s definition of MMNH, the moral motivation is merely a justification for the harassment, which is actually based on prejudice against those populations, as shown above.

It is possible to see, then, that such a definition is the opposite of Clark’s (2020): for the latter, cancellations work as an accountability instrument used by marginalized groups against powerful actors to attain justice, while Marwick (2021, 2023) sees MMNH as a weapon aimed especially against marginalized people to affirm groups’ identities based on prejudice, but justified on the basis of moral wrongdoing. Thus, it makes sense for Marwick to use a term that creates a dichotomy in which who attacks/harasses is bad and who is attacked/harassed is good, a victim.

Thus, it is visible that the problem is also the opposite of that of Clark (2020): Marwick (2021, 2023) ontologizes the phenomenon by assuming it to be essentially bad, an instrument of oppression operated under the façade of justice. That would mean that the wrongdoings in cases like Cooper's, Sacco's and Rowling's were also merely a justification for online harassment, that the groups involved are only interested in affirming their own identity – there is no real fight for justice. As I have objected Clark's positive characterization of the phenomenon as essentially an instrument of justice used by marginalized groups against the powerful, here I am also opposing the characterization of the phenomenon as an essentially negative and hypocritical affirmation of identity. Firstly, in the tradition of social reaction theories, as I will show at greater length in Chapter 3, and considering the cases used as examples, the phenomenon represents a search for justice for the groups involved, who perceive an instance of wrongdoing. As Wood and Hughes (1984) point out in relation to moral crusades, it is a methodological option *not to* assume supposedly objective reasons behind the shamers' actions, instead of considering their representations as the sincere and real reasons for their choices.

Secondly, the variety of cases shows that it is not possible to associate the phenomenon or the wrongdoing with a specific public or with a part of the political spectrum *a priori*. It is possible to see, thus, that this is not a choice between understanding the phenomenon as a social process in which marginalized communities seek justice using their own discursive and cultural practices (Clark, 2020), or as a weapon used mostly against marginalized communities, in which the search for justice is only a façade for prejudice that manifests through online hate (A. E. Marwick, 2021, 2023). The empirical cases show that shamings are tools that can be used both by dominant publics and counterpublics. Whatever these groups are, they perceive some wrongdoing that goes against their values and that affects their identity, their position in relation

to other groups, and they react to it with online attacks. Classifying this process as *good* or *bad* a priori ontologizes the concept and does not do much in the way of describing it. *Harassment*, therefore, is a term to be avoided.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the phenomenon involves many different practices that could be under the umbrella of harassment, it is important to remember that *harassment* can have various intentions, but here, the specific objective is to *shame*. As I will show, especially in Chapters 3 and 6, as a form of rule enforcement, the phenomenon punishes by withdrawing resources from the target, but it also does so by imposing shame: by exposing someone's flaws to the entire world to see, portraying them as someone degraded, who deserves to be outside of society. Therefore, if there are many instruments to harass the culprit, these have the specific intention of shaming.

Shaming, nonetheless, is not a theatre as proposed by Tyson (2022). Even though the process assumes dramatic forms (R. Lewis & Christin, 2022; Thompson, 1993), it is closer to a party, to a carnival. In theatre, some act and the audience watches; in shamings, the audience acts, imposes the shame and rejoices in it – this is a defining feature of the phenomenon. In this way, the term *shame*, for being so specific to the phenomenon, deserves a place in its nomenclature.

Furthermore, despite the phenomenon taking place on private platforms, as criticized by Tyson (2022), I am using the term *public*, for a few reasons. Firstly, as indicated by Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021), the phenomenon is *public* because it involves actors who are strangers to the initial context of the case or relationship with the shamed. In this way, “public” is used here in the dictionary meaning of “relating to or involving people in general, rather than being limited to a particular group of people” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Moreover, deeming

a shaming *public* highlights its connection to pre-modern punishments: in the former, as in the latter, it is essential to *publicize disgrace*, to *humiliate* the target in front of the community, to make them an *example* (Thompson, 1993). For all this to happen, it is necessary to expose the culprit and their wrongdoing to people other than those who are immediately involved or their close relations – to the public in general.

Online public shaming, therefore, is an expression able to convey the defining (but not exclusively) virtual nature of the phenomenon; the participation of people in general (potentially the entire globe) in the issue, going beyond the initial context and making disgrace known by all; and its main objective of enforcing a rule by using shame: by making the culprit an *outsider* to entire online community.

8. Conclusion

Each of the five cases was described, and their potential elements were analyzed, in the hopes of delimiting the subject of this work. After all that, is there anything specific to the shamings seen here that could delimit the phenomenon?

From the analysis, therefore, it is possible to say that the shaming observed here follows a process like this:

- In a given, favourable social context;
- A specific individual or small group of individuals;
- Produces an act located in a time and place;
- This act is made available to public knowledge and spreads via mass self-communication;
- Reaching out to people beyond the initial context of the act or opinion;

- These people react via mass self-communication to the wrongdoing and to the individual, both directly addressing the culprit and creating commentary about the case;
- The reacting people include multiple, varied actors, with varying interests;
- The actors react due to the outrage caused by the wrongdoing, but they can also do so because they feel pleasure and are entertained by the shaming, besides trying to capitalize on the visibility of the case; and,
- The culprit as well as third parties, might suffer consequences, which usually include firing, threats, doxxing, psychological problems, etc., besides giving up on their side of the story.

In this way, an *online public shaming is a mass self-communicated reaction to a wrongdoing and a wrongdoer, conducted by a variety of out-of-context agents with multiple interests, outraged by the wrongdoing, entertained by the shaming and interested in the visibility to be gained with it. The reaction includes both direct reproach against the shamed but also discourse about the shaming. It might impose financial, social, and psychological consequences on the shamed and on third parties involved.*

In the coming chapters, I intend to address sociological and historical concepts that might help critically understand online public shaming mechanisms and development.

CHAPTER 3: Defining Society's Moral Reality, Defining Deviance

1. Why Moral Crusades?

In the previous chapter, I have characterized and defined *online public shamings*. Now that the empirical phenomenon has been presented, it is possible to look for other social phenomena that resemble it, with characteristics that match those of online public shamings (“shamings,”), even if just in part. Notice that it is not my intention to find a phenomenon that completely matches and explains shamings, a sort of offline doppelganger of shaming that could be easily transposed to online relationships, bringing along all the sociological explanations of it. Any comparison made primarily to find such a match risks flattening differences and uncritically highlighting resemblances.

In this chapter, I will analyze a phenomenon that has some characteristics in common with online public shamings: moral crusades. Why moral crusades? Moral crusades, firstly, are rituals of public denunciation, of moral indignation, of degradation of another culture (Garfinkel, 1956; Gusfield, 1963). The public denunciation of something that ignited indignation looked like a point in common between online public shamings and moral crusades. In both phenomena, a superficial look at the phenomenon showed a collective organization searching for means and support to change, somehow, an outrageous situation. The righteousness of the involved parties, the absolutism of their belief, and the use of any means necessary to correct a great evil was also present both moral crusades and shamings. Indeed, the moral crusades concept first came to my attention as a possible tool to understand shamings because of the crusaders' blind faith in the good they pursue and their use of whatever means necessary to do so. The crusader's belief in the content of a moral or legal rule and their self-perceived righteousness struck me as a characteristic in common with online public shamings.

Other aspects of both phenomena, however, were divergent: while crusaders want the creation of a rule (such as the 18th Amendment to the US constitution, wherein the US Temperance movement instituted Prohibition), shamers apparently want the punishment of a specific person. The amount of dedication, time and organization in the two phenomena are wildly different: moral crusades involve organized groups marching and petitioning, perhaps for years and years; shamings happen through a networked architecture that needs minimal engagement and time. Notwithstanding that, the public degradation ceremony of both phenomena organize the efforts of a mass of people around a theme of moral indignation and this brings the two themes so close to each other that a longer analysis of what they share in common is necessary.

I will start by analyzing different ways of understanding the phenomena identified as moral crusades. Truly, collective behaviours such as witch-hunts, satanic panics, the abolitionist movement, and the temperance movement have been explained by elites, grassroots and interest groups theories. Therefore, I will start by illustrating how the creation of social problems can be interpreted through these three main perspectives: elite, grassroots, and interest group theories. In that section, I will also show that each of the three perspectives can contribute to understanding shamings. I will give special attention to interest groups theories and to Becker's (1963) account of moral crusades. After that, I will define the concept of moral crusade and analyze each of its elements, contrasting them with the empirical cases of shamings seen in the first chapter. The intention is to verify how moral crusades' elements do or do not explain what is observed in shamings.

Finally, this chapter will show that online public shamings, similar to moral crusades, are social disputes over society's rules. Through a social process of degradation of others, shamers and moral crusaders aim at the prominence of their values.

2. Problems in Moral Crusades

It is fairly widely accepted that the term *moral crusades* was delimited by Howard Becker or at least coined by him (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Greco, 2016; Young, 2007). Even though this exact origin can be attributed to the term, the use of the concept and its definition are nothing close to exact. While some will consider a *crusade* only when certain people or groups can be pointed out as responsible for the entrepreneurship animating the crusade, others use the concept to consider class relations or spontaneous grassroots actions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Jenkins, 1992). There are also other similar (but not identical) concepts to moral crusades, such as moral entrepreneurship and moral panics. Moreover, the concept has been constantly associated with reactionary, conservative, or decadent upper-class movements, even though not all moral crusades present these characteristics (Mathieu, 2005).

Besides the definitional problems, the concept also seems to have lost its power over time. According to Young (2007), in the past years, Labelling Theory, on which the concept of moral crusades is based, has lost its relevance. The moral crusades concept has not been refined or duly criticized, with a few exceptions, and it has been captured by the media, "...that tend to use it as a sobriquet for virtually any person, group, or organization that makes any kind of moral claim" (p. 3088) and by politicians and companies for their social agendas. Young says that, nowadays, the concept has been re-used mostly by moral panic academics, who have updated the latter concept in terms of the impacts of new media technologies (see, for example, Jenkins, 1992; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995). Indeed, the same is not true in relation to moral crusades,

where sociological analysis is still the same as when pamphlets were commonly used to spread ideas.

It is impossible to address all these matters in this thesis, so I will focus on those aspects that will allow a comparison of moral crusades to shamings: exploring the sociological explanations for their occurrence, delimiting the concept, and confronting it with the empirical data presented in the first chapter.

3. Sociological Explanations for the Construction of Social Problems

Moral crusades and moral panics are situated within the constructivist tradition of social problems (Jenkins, 1992), which are understood as neither ontological nor natural, but actually the result of a collective process, dispute and negotiation (Blumer, 1971; Gusfield, 1981). In this process, what is a problem, what is its solution, and who is responsible for the problem, result from a bargain between people with different interests, in "...a process of collective definition" (Blumer, 1971, p. 301). A moral crusade is, in this sense, a process for forming social problems.

To locate moral crusades among the various forms of creating social problems, I will use the works of Jenkins (1992) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009). These authors developed categorization schemes that explore the main sociological explanations for the appearance of social problems and deviance, respectively. The analysis of these different theories will also help to identify possible participants in the moral crusades and shamings, as well as the interests involved.

In his constructivist analysis of moral panics in Great Britain, Jenkins (1992) explains that theories about social problems and moral panics can be divided between those "...who see a new problem or panic as useful for society as a whole, or some substantial part of it; and those

who stress the role of some smaller unit – a group or even an individual" (p. 4). Jenkins draws a parallel between those who see panics as useful to the whole society with Durkheimian, Marxist or Weberian perspectives, while associating those who see panics as useful to a smaller unit with Conflict Theory. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) point out three main types of theories for the appearance of moral panics, based on the social group which would induce them: elites, grassroots movements and interest groups. These categorizations by Jenkins and Goode and Ben-Yehuda overlap almost entirely, as it is shown below.

3.1. Elites Theories

One of the large societal groups pointed out as responsible for the construction of social problems is composed of elites (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jenkins, 1992). This is the Marxist approach, according to which a class-polarized society is necessary for the appearance of social problems (Jenkins, 1992). As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) explain, in this sort of approach, which they call *Elites Theories*, "...elites fabricate, orchestrate, or engineer a panic from a nonexistent or trivial threat ...in order to gain something of value or divert attention away from issues that, if addressed, would threaten their own interests" (p. 54). This manipulation is possible thanks to the elites' dominance of the political and media systems, allowing them to make legislation and turn public opinion in their favour. In this way, as Jenkins (1992) exemplified with the work of Chambliss, the Salem witch trials were not a unified response of society. Instead, New England elites – above all the Protestant clergy – artificially initiated the panic as a reaction to a threat to their interests and ideological position.

Amongst the elites theories, Galliher and Walker (1978) are fierce critics of the interest groups approach. Focusing on the analysis of the US Marihuana Tax Act conducted by authors like Becker, the authors conclude that the moral entrepreneurship theory disregards structural

reasons for the prohibition of the drug, including class conflict and economic factors. For them, Becker neglected the prohibition of marijuana as a means used by the elites to control minorities, instead, vilifying a group or person as responsible for the criminalization. For Galliher and Walker, larger structural issues are the true causes of social problems arising: the US Narcotics Bureau's entrepreneurial activities merely triggered the creation of legislation that was actually the product of an unequal society.

Beisel (1990), on the other hand, understands that class analysis can be integrated by status defence theories (which are part of interest groups theories), like Gusfield's (1963) and Zurcher et al.'s (1971). Beisel states that movements of moral reform can be studied as "...a form of class politics" (p. 45). Beisel investigates anti-vice movements in Philadelphia, New York and Boston in the late-nineteenth century. Indeed, in New York and Boston the elites engaged in campaigns against pornography, gambling, and corruption to protect themselves from immigrants, especially the working-class Irish, who were becoming politically prominent at the time. The movement in those two cities was, therefore, a part of a class conflict. In Philadelphia, however, the immigrant working class was smaller and less organized, did not represent a threat to the elites, and so moral crusades were not created.

Elites theories offer important insights into this research on shamings, particularly regarding the role of capitalist interests, including advertisers, traditional media, and tech companies, in online attacks. Indeed, the capture of internet outrage for marketing goals is not unusual. J.K Rowling's case is a good example. While the internet was battling against her comments about "people who menstruate," the company The Body Shop replied to Rowling with an ad campaign. Moreover, online outrage helps the interests of tech companies, to which social media site users are advertisement targets and sources of personal data: more outrage means

more online interaction means more likes, comments, stories, retweets, postings, and clicks – which means larger advertisement revenues and more extracted data from users (Fuchs, 2014). Finally, traditional media also participate in these crusades. One can find about Sacco on the CNN, BuzzFeed or ABC websites (BuzzFeed News, 2013; CNN, 2013; Dimitrova et al., 2013), read about Amy Cooper on the online version of the *New York Times* (Levin, 2020; Nir, 2020b), or follow Rowling's case in several legacy news media platforms (e.g., Coggan, 2019; Landsberg, 2018; Luu, 2020; McNally, 2015).

It is important, in this way, to keep in mind how economic class interests that are not related to the moral content of an outrage movement, be it a crusade or a shaming, such as the advertisers' interests, can influence the movement nonetheless. But is this co-occurrence enough to use an elites model to analyze shamings? "Naturally, many moral crusades draw support from people whose motives are less pure than those of the crusader", writes Becker (1963, p. 149). A more complex analysis of crusades and shamings should assume that some actors and groups might join these movements for utilitarian purposes, to keep their economic status. Recognizing this possibility does not mean, on the other hand, equating an entire crusade or shaming with the result of elites' scheming.

Indeed, the denial of agency to the middle and working classes is a problem in the elites models in general, not just when applied to online settings. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) criticize some elites models as "empirically overdrawn", "fanciful" and "strictly comic book fare". (p. 66). For example, they analyze Hall et al.'s work (1978), which argues that British elites used narratives about the rise of street crime to legitimize their power over the middle and working classes, diverting attention from an economic crisis. Nonetheless, Goode and Ben-

Yehuda show – partially supported by Waddington (1966) – that British street crime was indeed rising, and it affected especially those lower classes:

In fact, the urban and suburban poor, the working class, the middle class, are directly affected by street crime, it is real for them, and consequently they are interested in stories about it. This does not come about as a result of collusion between the rich and the media, much as that resonates with leftist ideologists as a politically instructive atrocity tale. (p. 66).

Like Goode and Ben-Yehuda, I believe that one of the main problems with the elites model is its reliance on a conspiratorial scheme that gives agency entirely to just a small segment of the population, neglecting the capacities of large masses to create their own demands and give meaning to social matters. Indeed, it is important not to neglect that social media platforms are interested in increasing online interactions, and that for-profit companies might take advantage of a prominent online discussion to gain visibility. These interests and inputs, however, do not erase the existence of other interests and projects that also mould online shamings.

In sum, this thesis assumes that elites can influence crusades as well as shamings. Notwithstanding that, this position does not presuppose, that these elite groups are solely responsible for these movements. In some situations, elites might dominate or even fabricate a crusade or shaming, but here I am assuming their position is as participants.

3.2. Grassroots Theories

Another explanation for the appearance of social problems, for Jenkins (1992), is the union of society against a common enemy: "a panic is... seen in terms of generalized fears and anxieties of a large part of the population" (p. 4). Jenkins exemplifies the point using the Salem witch trials. That phenomenon can be understood as something that united the "...New England society, which was riven by social and political conflict" (p. 4). The creation of a common enemy—the witches—as a response to this crisis formed the unified "normal" society.

This classification corresponds to what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) call *grassroots theories*, according to which panic erupts spontaneously in society, with no specific group or social strata being responsible for it. For Goode and Ben-Yehuda, who partially adopt the grassroots model themselves, elites, interest groups, journalists, and other actors are unable to start a panic if there is no latent fear in society. Thus, if these actors manifest panic, they are just reacting to the panic in the whole society. This socially-spread fear works as a precondition for a moral panic. The fear is defined as "the bedrock of deeply-felt attitudes and beliefs on the part of a broad swathe of the society that a phenomenon or condition is a very real and present danger to their values, their safety, or their very existence" (p. 56).

Truly, there is an important grassroots element in the introductory examples (Cooper, etc.): after all, these online movements gain relevance when large numbers of people quickly adhere to them. Using the grassroots explanation, the cases can be interpreted as groups or individuals igniting the larger publics' cherished morality. Consider Cooper's, Sacco's, and Rowling's cases: they all arose in the public eye amid social contexts in which the values at stake were already the objects of intense social dispute. American society was paying close attention to racism in 2013 (Sacco) and 2020 (Cooper), and trans rights were under scrutiny in England since the 2010s (Rowling).

However, one main aspect of the shaming cases presented here is important for understanding the limitations of grassroots theories: the importance of groups and individuals to the cause's visibility. Surely, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) point out, activists and interest groups are responsible for materializing the grassroots concerns into organized movements.

In online public shamings, this issue manifests in the process through which these cases gain visibility, in the sense of reaching a larger public than that of the original context (boyd,

2014). That is because, even if information and communication technologies (ICTs) bring out the *potential* of anything being visible to an enormous number of people, that visibility is neither natural nor spontaneous but depends on other factors, such as the connectivity of the individuals and groups involved and the communicational strategies used. For example, Justine Sacco tweeted to her circa 200 followers at a time of heightened visibility of racism in America. That was not enough to start the global movement against her. That only happened when one of her followers emailed the tweet to Sam Biddle, a gossip journalist with 15,000 followers. Adria Richards, on the other hand, already had more than 8,000 followers on Twitter when she published the picture of the PyCon engineers. Rowling has millions of followers, and Cooper got retweeted by broadcaster Soledad O'Brien. Among the cases, only in Stone's case is there no information about an ultra-connected node involved in disseminating the wrongdoing to a larger network. In almost all these cases, therefore, their visibility was probably enhanced by an actor or actors with high connectivity and influence. As I will show in the methodology chapter, in Sacco's case, despite the participation of tens of thousands of people in the shaming, only 591 users were actually mentioned by at least 10 others, and they accounted for 70% of the network's mentions. In other words, there is a concentration of communications in very few participants, who end up producing the most important messages in the network.

That concentration indicates that, probably, in the cases seen here, there was some social group that already had concerns and interests in the values at stake; this grassroots interest made it possible for shamings to start, without excluding the participation of prominent groups and individuals advocating for the cause and bringing it forward. In this way, integrating interest groups theories with grassroots models might provide a richer explanation of these matters.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) suggest such integration:

Thus, the grassroots model cannot be dismissed out of hand, but by itself, it does not offer a complete explanation of moral panics; its influence works as a precondition for the successful efforts of social movement activists. It points to a crucial factor in the dynamics of moral panics. Some moral panics operate exclusively on a grassroots basis—as we saw, they are expressed more or less exclusively on the interpersonal level in the form of rumor and urban legend—but never manage to catapult beyond face-to-face or local constraints. . . . *In the explosion of a full-fledged moral panic, we see the grassroots sentiment as the dynamite and the efforts and organization of social movement activists as the fuse and the match. In such cases, there is a dovetailing of the two societal sectors, not a contradiction.*

The reverse takes place as well: in some cases, movement activists attempt to mobilize an indifferent public about a given issue and fail. All activists have to consider the "What if we threw a party and nobody came?" problem: all the organized activities in the world cannot create concerns in the public where no latency for them exists. (p. 70—my emphasis)

It is important to notice that diassociating grassroots movements from interest groups creates artificial problems in the typology of the creation of social problems. See, for example, how Jenkins (1992) separates Gusfield from Becker because the former uses large societal groups as the basis of symbolic crusades (grassroots movement), while the latter focuses on small groups or individuals (interest groups). Considering that (1) Becker's (1963) theory is partially based on Gusfield's (1963) symbolic crusades (see, on Becker, e.g., pp. 148-149) to explain the causes of moral crusades, and (2) that Gusfield dedicates quite some attention to specific groups in the Temperance movement (e.g., the Women's Christian Temperance Union), Jenkin's differentiation does not seem adequate to me. What happens is that both Gusfield and Becker analyse movements that have large grassroots components but that are galvanized by interest groups. Indeed, Gusfield's work, for example, at the same time explores the status maintenance interest of large societal groups and the importance of activists and organized associations in achieving their goals.

In this way, by integrating the grassroots and interest groups approaches, moral crusades and shamings can be interpreted as the product of a large social concern, but one that is galvanized by the action of specific individuals and groups. To better understand this combined approach, I will now address the Interest Groups Theories.

3.3. Interest Groups

A third explanation for the construction of social problems is that of pressure from interest groups:

In the interest-group perspective, professional associations, police departments, portions of the media, religious groups, educational organizations, and so on, may have an independent stake in bringing an issue to the fore, focusing attention on it or transforming the slant of news stories covering it, alerting legislators, demanding stricter law enforcement, instituting new educational curricula, and so on (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p. 67).

I will explore interest groups theories, but I will also go beyond the question of who creates a social problem. Many concepts in Becker's (1963) sociology of deviance matter here, materializing in the concept of crusades but also going beyond it. I am especially interested in the concepts of *interest*, *deviance*, *rule creation* and *rule enforcement*. These concepts are necessary to understand crusades, but they can also be used more broadly, within grassroots and elites theories allowing us to understand why some people and actions are deemed deviant, how different groups participate in constructing this deviance and why, and what the phases of this construction are. I try to argue with Becker (1963) and Gusfield (1963) that crusaders have an interest in changing society's moral code, which symbolizes the status of a group within society. These interests become rules and are enforced through power disputes. In the sense of the word *crusader* that I will adopt by the end of this chapter, however, a *crusader* is someone who believes in the content of a rule. In that context, a crusade is the whole movement to extend this rule to all society, which includes both interest groups and grassroots movements, in the integration suggested by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009).

The explanations for why groups engage in a crusade vary: to defend their elite status (Gusfield, 1963; Zurcher et al., 1971), to consolidate a profession (Luker, 1984), or even to defend a certain lifestyle (Page & Clelland, 1978). Notwithstanding their differences, what all

these explanations have in common is that they portray groups and individuals with specific interests as the starters of the recognition of a social problem.

In this model, Gusfield's (1963) *Symbolic Crusades* is highly influential, being a major reference for Becker (1963) and Zurcher et al. (1971). Indeed, Gusfield's work marked "...the shift of emphasis from a more economic class-based version of status discontent toward a style of life or 'status group' version" (Wood & Hughes, 1984, p. 87). Gusfield (1963) analyses the Temperance movement as based not on economic interests but on morality, which was used to re-state the superiority of the native-born American, Protestant and rural populations in opposition to immigrant, non-Protestant and urban populations.

In *Symbolic Crusade's* final chapter, Gusfield (1963) explores the meaning of governmental acts such as the Prohibition. In Gusfield's approach, crusades are symbolical movements of social groups trying to maintain their status; in this way, these groups pressure government officials to create symbolic acts that distribute prestige among different groups: "In seeking to effect their honor and prestige in the society, a group makes demands upon governing agents to act in ways which serve to symbolize deference or to degrade the opposition whose status they challenge or who challenged theirs" (p.167).

Legislation and other governmental acts have material consequences, such as economic impacts and behavioural changes, says Gusfield (1963). However, these instrumental effects are accompanied by the symbolic function of political acts, which are also "... forms of rhetoric functioning to organize the perceptions attitudes and feelings of observers" (p. 170). In this way, governmental actions of various sorts—law, ceremonies, discourses—*persuade* people instead of forcing them into behaviour.

In Gusfield's (1963) analysis, the Temperance movement and the Desegregation movement search for the official recognition of conferring prestige to one status group over another, a recognition of what status group is dominant in society: "Status issues indicate, by their resolution, the group culture or style of life to which government and society are publicly committed" (p.173). And, for Gusfield the symbolic crusade is a status matter because it is focused on the lifestyles of different groups, not class divisions.

Following Gusfield's theorization of status defence, Zurcher et al. (1971) examined why elites that are not in a situation of material need organize social movements. They analyzed two anti-pornography campaigns in two different American cities and concluded that these campaigns aimed to protect several sets of values: religious, sexual, work-related and others. These values were threatened by the countercultural movement happening at the time. Moreover, the Zurcher et al. realized that these crusaders were satisfied by simply having their values recognized and supported, without really challenging the threatening social changes.

In a similar way, but focusing on professional status, Luker (1984) associates the nineteenth-century anti-abortion campaign in the US as a status defence of American physicians, a professional category that was attempting social climbing. At the time, physicians competed with "folk" doctors due to the lack of regulation of the healing market. Physicians, usually wealthier than the other health professionals, tried to distinguish themselves from the competition, and the opposition to abortion served that purpose well. Being anti-abortion, the doctors presented themselves as "...both more scientifically knowledgeable and more morally rigorous than their competition" (p. 27).

In their turn, Page and Clelland (1978), who use the expression "politics of lifestyle concern" (p. 266), examined an episode when part of the population of Kanawha County, West

Virginia, crusaded against the selection of the local school textbooks. Page and Clelland conclude that the revolt in Kanawha was not a matter of prestige maintenance or class conflict but a matter of the defence of lifestyle, which affects groups across different economic, educational, and class dimensions. In this way, both the falling-status majority and rising-status minority can seek dominance through this kind of moral movement: “Lifestyle concern is most clearly evident when fading majorities come to recognize the eclipse of their way of life through loss of such control. But rising minorities also engage in these struggles for cultural protection and dominance” (p. 267).

Among the interest group authors, Becker’s (1963) work is particularly useful for this research on online public shamings. His detailed examination of power disputes as constructions of deviance, rules and rule enforcement provides a model for understanding shamings. This research also gains from the comparison of a special interest group—the moral crusaders—with shamers. I will, then, dedicate the rest of this section to Becker’s work.

In *Outsiders*, Becker (1963) addresses the concept of *deviance*, which the author characterizes as socially constructed. In the author’s words, “...deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’” (p. 9). That is, deviance is not intrinsic to some acts or people, but a quality attributed to them by others with the power to do so, in a process of rule creation and rule enforcement. For Becker, this process through which rules are defined and applied depends on the distribution of political and economic power among different groups in society, and interest groups are likely to be involved in rule creation and enforcement.

Indeed, all social groups define the frontiers of what they consider “right” and “wrong” behaviour, using social rules to do so and applying these rules in some cases, says Becker

(1963). The person who supposedly breaks the rules is considered an “outsider,” someone who cannot be trusted to live within the established social rules. Deciding which rules apply in society is the result of social dispute, in which those with more economic and political power prevail.

Therefore, for Becker (1963), society has many groups with many different rules, and the rules that prevail and that actually get enforced depend on legal and extra-legal power disputes between these groups. And these disputes involve entrepreneurial acts of *rule creation* and *rule enforcement*.

To understand rule creation and rule enforcement, Becker (1963) offers a panorama of the rules development process. Initially, society holds *values* that orient what is right or wrong, but these are too abstract to give concrete answers in real-life situations. For instance, in a certain society, equality may be a valued principle, but it does not provide concrete guidelines for achieving greater equality between men and women, for example. Or *life* might be an important value for a certain group, but it does not as such inform if abortions are prohibited for them. To address these specific situations, society creates specific commands—*rules*. Through these rules, values become more defined and less abstract: *thou shalt not kill; women have the right to maternity leave of X months; abortion is not allowed and punishable with jail time*. Later, these rules are enforced when a violation is verified. Enforcement occurs when a consequence, a sanction, is imposed upon someone for breaking a rule; for example, jail time for a woman who has an abortion. In this sense, enforcement, in Becker’s sense, is a punishment for the breaking of a rule.

What is essential is to keep in mind is Becker’s (1963) insistence on the social dispute involved in each of these phases. If different groups have different values, deciding which rules will be created and applied gets disputed. In this dispute, access to various resources, such as

media exposure, may weigh in favour of one group or another. An *entrepreneur* might lead this power dispute for the creation or enforcement of rule, says Becker (1963). An entrepreneur is someone who will push for the creation of certain rules, gathering the necessary means and support for it:

Wherever rules are created and applied, we should be alive to the possible presence of an enterprising individual or group. Their activities can properly be called moral enterprise, for what they are enterprising about is the creation of a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of right and wrong (Becker, 1963, pp. 145–146).

Becker (1963) exemplifies this with the creation of the Marihuana Tax Act. The entrepreneur was the Treasury Department's Bureau of Narcotics, which went to the media and to the US Congress to defend the prohibition of marijuana. Noteworthy, however, is that the Bureau's will to prohibit the drug had to be reconciled with the economic interests of, for example, hemp clothing producers. These actors also had the power to be represented in Congress and to dispute the rule creation process, adapting its product.

Moreover, enforcement, which for Becker (1963) is the imposition of punishing consequences upon the culprit for the perceived breaking of a rule, guarantees the following of the rule and its existence. As the Becker says, enforcement "...is an enterprising act. Someone—an entrepreneur—must take the initiative in punishing the culprit" (p. 121). Someone must notice the act and blow the whistle, making it deviant; when that happens, the whistleblower has an interest in doing so.

Becker (1963) does not define what *interest* is concerning deviance-building, but he gives plenty of examples showing that the concept should be interpreted broadly. The prohibitionist movement in the US, for one, counted on moral crusaders who believed that drinking was an evil and were interested in bettering the lives of other, less fortunate citizens. Their interest was, then, a sincere belief in the goodness of the rule. At the same time, however, "some industrialists

supported Prohibition because they felt it would provide them with a more manageable labor force” (p. 150); that is, their interest in the rule was opportunistic—what mattered was not the morality of the rule, but the profits the actors could gain from it. It is apparent then that *interest* encompasses all sorts of objectives related to the process of creating deviance: not only the moral belief in the content of the rule but also whatever makes the rule beneficial to a given actor.

Finally, the entrepreneurial sequence of value-rule-enforcement does not necessarily follow this exact order: Becker (1963) warns that the values, rules, and enforcement might appear in different orders. Therefore, enforcement might exist without a previous rule; a rule in this case can be created *a posteriori*, justifying the enforcement. What matters, then, is to observe the activities of enforcement and creation of rules as *social disputes*, not as exact abstract sequences.

Inside the rule-creation category, Becker (1963) identifies a sub-species of entrepreneur, that of the *moral crusader*. Moral crusaders are a special kind of entrepreneur, mainly due to their belief in and defence of the context of the rule. So, instead of just analyzing how interest groups theories might be a good explanation for shamings, I will also do it considering this special kind of entrepreneurship of the moral crusader.

It is important to reiterate that a moral entrepreneur is *someone* (a group or individual) who, *gathering means and support, pushes for the creation of a rule*, as a part of society’s moral constitution (Becker, 1963). What is special about moral crusaders, according to Becker (1963), is that they advocate for rule creation because *they believe in the content of the law*. For the moral crusaders (e.g., movements against alcohol consumption (Gusfield, 1963)), the law (the 18th Amendment) is perceived as being good in its original purpose since it opposes some deep evil (vice) that crusaders must make right. In other words, the moral crusaders have a non-

utilitarian take on the rule. This is not the case for other moral entrepreneurs (non-crusaders) to whom the law fulfils economic, professional, or utilitarian goals. For example, the Nevada gambling industry, as a moral entrepreneur, supported anti-gambling rules in California as an economic strategy, not a moral one. Moral crusaders fight gambling because it is evil in itself.

Crusaders see the evil to be fought in absolutist terms: everything is wrong until this one thing is not made right, explains Becker (1963). They feel morally superior and entirely correct about their cause. They are "...fervent and righteous, often self-righteous" (p. 148). Crusaders are so sure about it being "truly and totally evil with no qualification..." that "[a]ny means is justified to do away with it" and "...their mission is a holy one" (p. 148). Furthermore, some crusaders feel legitimized not just because of their certainty and absolute ethic, but also because their cause is what is best for others: "Many moral crusaders have strong humanitarian overtones... He [the crusader] believes that if they [other people] do what is right it will be good for them" (p. 148). Becker adds, following Gusfield (1963), "that moral crusades are typically dominated by those in the upper levels of the social structure—means that they add to the power they derive from the legitimacy of their moral position, the power they derive from their superior position in society" (p. 150).

However, not all participants in a crusade are crusaders. For Becker (1963), among the crusaders' supporters, some might have very different interests. As aforementioned, groups and individuals with utilitarian interests might approach the crusade to influence the process despite lacking any true belief in its content. When the rule is finally elaborated, for example, the crusader depends on the advice of professionals such as lawyers and doctors to draft it. At this stage, however, the crusaders had already won their case, so they leave the drafting details to others and leave the door open to unwanted results. For example, say that a crusader fights for

harder laws for certain crimes, but the lawyer who writes the legislation “forgets” to include a type of felony his law practice specializes in, for example. In this way, a crusade serves purposes other than fighting evil. Anyway, if successful, a crusade leaves behind a new set of rules and apparatus for enforcing these rules.

4. Online Public Shamings and Crusades

In the previous chapter, I have described online public shaming as a *mass self-communicated reaction to a wrongdoing and a wrongdoer, conducted by a variety of out-of-context agents with multiple interests, outraged by the wrongdoing, entertained by the shaming and interested in the visibility to be gained with it. The reaction includes both direct reproach against the shamed but also discourse about the shaming. It might impose financial, social, and psychological consequences to the shamed and to third parties involved.* I will analyze, now, how interest groups and moral crusades might be used as tools for analyzing the basic configuration of shamings, keeping in mind the complex relationship that interest groups have with grassroots movements.

As I warned at the beginning of this chapter, moral crusades may not be a perfect fit for the empirical observations of shamings. Some of the concept’s dimensions, though, are useful to explain and understand parts of the shaming phenomenon. To do so, I will analyse each element of moral crusades, which can be defined as when *a person or group gathers means and support to push for the creation of a rule, because the agent believes in the content of the norm in absolutist terms.* Using this definition, I will compare moral crusades to the empirical cases of shamings described in chapter one. In this definition, I am considering Becker’s (1963), Mathieu’s (2005) and Wood and Hughes’ (1984) characterizations of moral crusades. Becker’s account of crusades is interesting since it is within his concept of interest-constructed deviance,

and it highlights the *absolutist* characteristic of the crusades. Nonetheless, Mathieu's and Wood and Hughes' considerations are important to critically analyze the participation of dominant and minority groups in a crusade, as well as the pursuit of status.

4.1. "Person or group...": the Moral Crusader

Moral crusades are started by an individual or a group, says Becker (1963). It is important to notice, however, that all cases studied by him and Gusfield (1963), Zurcher et al. (1971), Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), Weitzer (2007), Beisel (1990), Jenkins (1992), Mathieu (2005), Eder (1985) and Galliher and Walker (1978) are cases of moral crusades led by groups. In other words, the literature is dominated by examples of collective crusades, even though Becker indicates the possibility of individual ones.

However, even in collective crusades, individuals are still important, at least as leaders of the crusade. Zurcher et al. (1971), based on Smelser's reflections on collective behaviour, explains that a leader has crucial importance in a collective behaviour such as a crusade. Truly, other social conditions (catalytic dramatic events, structural strain, among others) must be present for the happening of a moral crusade, but once they are present, the participation of leaders is then crucial for mobilization. Indeed, the authors show how important the leaders' dedication (and profile) was for the two anti-pornography crusades:

Impressively, the key leaders of ICCD [Interdenominational Citizens' Council for Decency], Mrs. Roberts, and of UFD [Uprising for Decency], Mr. King, were dedicated to and intensely involved in all aspects of the anti-pornography effort. (...) Not uncommonly, she [the crusade leader, Mrs. Roberts] spent all of her waking hours on a given day engaged in ICCD tasks. Mr. King (...) spent up to 50 hours a week working with UFD during its full mobilization period. (Zurcher et al., 1971, p. 227)

The authors also notice how Gusfield "... has documented such dedication among the leaders of the Temperance symbolic crusade" (Zurcher et al., 1971). Beisel (1990) also focuses on the activities of the anti-vice crusade leaders, Anthony Comstock in Boston and New York,

and Josiah Leeds in Philadelphia. In the Kanawha textbook case, a prominent local religious woman was also important in noticing the problem and starting the community engagement against it (Page & Clelland, 1978). Despite the lack of studies of crusades by individuals, these analyses show the importance of individual action for a crusade's initial kindling and development.

The same can be observed about online public shamings. In some of the cases, a single individual was essential to kindle the collective movement. The gossip journalist Sam Biddle with his 15,000 followers is the most obvious example: his retweet made Sacco's story gain traction. The same can be said about broadcaster Soledad O'Brien's retweet of the Central Park video, Adria Richards' tweet to her thousands of followers, and even the PlayHaven engineers' complaint against Richards in a sympathetic public forum of an online forum for coders. In all these cases, the individual creates the complaint and/or demands support for their cause, leading the way for others. A collective response might follow this lead, in the form of online petitions, massive social media attacks (posts, responses etc.), hacker activities, demands made to the authorities, and threats. And, besides the individuals, both crusaders and shamers involve masses of people claiming something. How do these masses organize, however, is different in both movements, as will be shown in the next topic.

4.2. "...gathering means and support, pushes for...":

i - Organized crusades

Crusades are collective movements in which associations are formed, rallies organized, and petitions signed. This is how the literature usually describes the crusades' gathering of support. On the other hand, at first glance, shamers do not establish a formal union and organize to attack a target individual: they simply like or retweet content and send messages to the target

individual. Is there, then, concerted action among these actors to gather the necessary resources to shame someone?

The conscious organizing activities that form a crusade are well described by authors such as Becker (1963), Gusfield (1963), Zurcher et al. (1971), Beisel (1990) and Page and Clelland (1978). What these authors explain is all the effort and time spent to achieve the normative goal of the crusade, how this process is organized and structured, and, in other words, how crusaders gather means and support to obtain the creation of a rule.

In some cases (Beisel, 1990; Gusfield, 1963; Page & Clelland, 1978; Zurcher Jr et al., 1971), there are clear leaders in a crusade, who dedicate an enormous amount of time and attention to the cause by talking to prominent community members, fundraising, organizing protests and giving lectures. Zurcher et al. (1971) gave particular focus to leaders and their cadre when studying anti-pornography campaigns. To the authors, leaders have an essential role in giving motion to a crusade, as cited in the previous topic. Crusades are also built up by the movement's cadre, composed of "...members [who] are influential in the community and from whom and with whom leaders can call upon additional expertise and assistance", as explained by Zurcher et al. (1971, p. 235). Moreover, crusaders might hire technical assistants to get organizational support; they might commission lecturers to speak to the community; and, finally, they might gather support in the community through petitions, rallies, letters, etc. Page and Clelland's (1978) description of the Kanawha textbook controversy illustrates the role of leaders and secondary participants, and their pressure instruments in the growth of a crusade (pp. 268-269):

The conflict was instigated by a single member of the school board, the articulate wife of a fundamentalist minister... this member objected to the method of textbook selection... she spoke in opposition to the books to the congregation of a local Baptist Church. Offensive excerpts were distributed to the

congregation and petitions against the books circulated. All of these events were duly covered by the news media....

... the anti-textbook protestors organized their ranks and developed strategy. They held marches, rallies, circulated petitions, appealed to elected officials, and planned a boycott of the school system for September... Protesting parents withheld their children from the schools... picketed businesses and mines throughout the county, and prevented school and city buses from operating.

...Random sniping was reported; vandalism of school property was commonplace; two schools were fire-bombed; and a picketing protestor was shot...

...several mayors representing Upper Kanawha Valley towns proposed a plan for the secession of their part of the county. (Page & Clelland, 1978, pp. 268–269)

It is evident, then, that some crusaders organize the movement through various acts, and a mass of crusaders adheres to the planned acts (rallies, petitions, boycotts), while others contribute in more spontaneous ways (vandalism, fire-bombing, shooting).

Finally, the gathering of support, in crusades, might culminate in the creation of an organization specially dedicated for the cause. Becker (1963), for example, observed the National Foundation of Infantile Paralysis; Gusfield (1963) followed the works of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the temperance movement; Zurcher et al. (1971) described the creation and management of the two above-mentioned anti-pornography associations, ICCD and UFD.

Marches, protests, physical attacks, solid organizations; dedicated leaders, prominent cadres, formal support via petitions or physical support via rallies: these methods and strategies all seem very distant from the online public shamings' *modus operandi* of simply clicking, liking, answering, tagging and hashtagging tweets. Comparatively, crusades also seem very long-lived: weeks, months or even years, while online shamings are fast phenomena, disappearing in a few days. Such a difference makes one wonder if there is, after all, any gathering of means or support or if shamings happen through a chaotic aggregation of multiple actors. To understand

this point, I will analyze, in the next couple of sections, the participants' intentions, their (de)centralization of efforts and how power differentials influence this matter.

ii - Organized shamings?

a. Intention and decentralization

At first sight, the online public shaming cases analyzed here could be understood as a simple and random process of response to information: an offended person publishes online about the offence they suffered, and other internet users simply react to it, not intending anything more than to express their feelings of outrage. Due to mass self-communication, however, the reaction spreads rapidly and massively. Any consequences for the offender are due to this massiveness, not intentionally attained and not due to any organized effort.

Notwithstanding first impressions, this approach is unable to capture the complexity that exists in an online shaming. As the cases analyzed in this work show, the shamers' manifestations are more varied and nuanced than simple expressions of disagreement. Their shaming messages involve, for example, commentaries on the topic of shaming, demonstrations of outrage, expressions of support, demands for punishment and even a search for means to punish the offender. Moreover, the cases also show that the initial publishers of the offensive fact are searching for more than just commentary or support; they aim for a larger, more noble objective.

In the Central Park case, Melody Cooper's (2020b) tweet received many messages of support, asking if her brother Christian (the birdwatcher) was well (e.g., user C1), pointing out the racism and hysteria of Amy's behaviour (the dog-walker) (e.g., user C2), and confirming that Amy had had similar bad behaviour in the past (e.g., users C3 and C4). Briefly, the messages

showed support for Melody Cooper and Christian, while also problematizing the encounter with Amy.

These responses reflected Melody's search for online support, awareness-raising and consequences for Amy. Indeed, on the same night of the Central Park encounter between Amy and Christian, Melody (2020c) thanked Twitter users for their support and care from. She stated that Christian was ok and explained that she "...wanted folks to know what happened to make sure *it never happens again from her*" (my emphasis). Later, Melody (2020a) made a more explicit connection of her brother's story with a larger problem: "...I want to say that it doesn't matter what education or job you have, every Black man is vulnerable. George Floyd ended up dead from police knee to his neck. *This is why we speak out and post and stay vigilant*" (my emphasis). Another tweet from Melody (2020b) a couple of hours later is also revealing: "We come from a family that has consistently *taken a stand and spoken out against injustice*. My brother and I were raised by amazing parents who were *activists* in their lives, and *we continue their legacy...*" (my emphasis).

It is very clear from Melody's messages that she understood that she and Christian were *speaking up* against an *injustice* that happened to Christian that is part of a larger structural problem. It is also clear that she seeks other people to testify about this injustice and to give their support to the siblings and to their cause, besides preventing Amy from ever doing putting a Black man's live in danger again. That is, Melody used Twitter as a means to (1) denounce a specific wrongdoing that (2) was part of a larger pattern of racism and (3) stop the perpetrator. On Twitter, Melody was validated and legitimized by Twitter users, who confirmed the injustice suffered and the larger racism problem; these users, moreover, also searched for means to expose

and punish Amy. The medium chosen for this *activism* is not an association or a petition against racism, but a Twitter post.

And support for Amy comes not only through users' comments pointing out racism and wishing Christian well. A Twitter user identified the previously-anonymous Amy Cooper (user C5), and the post was retweeted 724 times. Another user identified her, her employer, her employer's Twitter account and employer's street address (user C6), and had 910 retweets. Other users found and shared Amy's dog's Instagram account, pointing out that account's posts about the dog's injuries and how there were too many to be coincidental (users C7 and C8). Other users tagged the New York Police Department and asked it to take measures concerning the false report of a crime (user C9).

The same pattern is observed in the other cases. As stated by Biddle (2014b), he shared Sacco's tweet in part because it would generate rage, and, consequently, traffic to his website, but also because there was hope that this rage would be transformative—if not in Sacco's case, maybe in a future one: "Each, next outrage post was the one that would make a difference". Their mass rage would, at least, teach Sacco a lesson by, among other ways, publishing her professional data (user S4) and shaming Sacco's employer for not immediately firing her (users S5 and S6). In the case of Richards (2013c, 2013g), she made it clear how her choice in exposing the two engineers on Twitter was a form of "doing something", "taking action" and "advocating" for equality. Twitter worked for her, on that occasion, to gather support against the wrong being done at PyCon: Richards made the wrong by the two engineers public, and with the support of digital witnesses, called attention to the conference organizers to the sexual jokes at PyCon.

In some cases, the gathering of means and support gained an even more organized character, even though not at the same level of moral crusades. The creation of the "Fire Lindsay

Stone” Facebook group (Ronson, 2015a), and of a Change.org petition with the same objective are two examples. In Richards’ case, the shamers used 4chan forums to organize ways to harm her:

The people on this site [4Chan] were discussing ways to harm, harass, and humiliate me [Richards] and the other women they were targeting.

...

... My personal information about where I lived, my contact information, and more were publicly released onto sites like 4chan with active encouragement to contact, threaten, and harass me. The messaging began to change from simply being angry at me and calling me names to discussions about getting me fired. (Richards, in interview to McEwan, 2015).

Finally, in Rowling’s case, there were no requests for her to be fired or for an employer to take action. There are, however, ongoing demands for boycotting her and her work (users R15 and R16), and massive criticism, elaborated via tweeted answers, Twitter handles, likes and retweets.

In sum, from this initial empirical evidence, it is possible to conclude that shamers—both initiators and those who join the cause later—try to gather means and support for their cause, even though that happens in a different way from moral crusades. Online public shamings are not just the massive aggregate of online opinions but processes that shamers perceive and use as a form of activism, of solving a social problem.

In the shamings observed here, there are surely manifestations that are just commentary on the wrongdoing, but there are also those participants who offer support and search for further solutions. They contact employers, the police and other parties who can affect the shamed person; they try to increase the visibility of the topic; they attack the shamed person directly, with threats, doxing, and memes; and, they create online petitions and social media groups to achieve the shaming. This gathering of means and support is, notwithstanding, faster, more informal and less centralized than in moral crusades. Shamings neither last long enough for

shamers to create a formally organized association, nor is such an association necessary to shame an individual person. However, shamers do find ways to solve their problem, perceiving their acts as activism. As I will show in the analysis of Sacco's case, the empirical data demonstrates how shamers, organizing through hashtags and humour, gathered the necessary means to punish Sacco. Unlike a crusade, this informal organization is not long-lasting—Sacco's shaming peaks in a matter of hours—and there is no formal organization and no declared leader. Nonetheless, would any of that be necessary? The attackers achieve their goal of shaming Sacco using with these few decentralized resources. Moreover, the ephemeral nature of shaming demands little effort (Bouvier, 2020) and the organization still achieves its goal with a lasting and profound effect, as I will also demonstrate in the second analysis chapter.

As the cases show, therefore, there is an intention to achieve a goal and a search for resources present in shamings. It is also important to notice that this is why a very decentralized, spontaneous way of gathering means and support—which might contrast with a moral crusade's higher level of organization.

However, it is important to notice that there are activities that are organized in a centralized and decentralized manner both in crusades and in shamings. For example, the crusaders of the Kanawha County textbook controversy petitioned against the textbooks *and* vandalised school property (Page & Clelland, 1978). Similarly, Stone's shamers created online petitions *and* spontaneously cursed at her online. Therefore, the seeming dichotomy between decentralized and centralized action, or coordinated and spontaneous action is a matter not of exclusivity, but of degree. There are gatherings of means and support activities in both phenomena, but in crusades, that gathering generally happens in a more centralized and coordinated manner, while shamings are much more decentralized and spontaneous. It is also

possible to assume that different crusades and shamings will have different levels of such centralization and coordination. What is important, though, is to recognize that participants have the intention to gather means and support in both phenomena, but they do it in different ways.

b. Fragmented organization due to mass self-communication.

Why online public shamings are more decentralized and spontaneous has to do with the power differentials involved in the dispute over the construction of social problems, and how new tools, such as mass self-communication, bring new ways to fight in that dispute. If some crusaders can organize, or if some shamings become larger than their internet lives, that is due to advantageous power differentials. Changes in media are changes in the resources available for crusaders. Media is an essential resource in the communicative process of constructing social problems, in which it is necessary to capture the public's attention to convince that audience.

Gusfield (1963a) has noticed the importance of media's workings as well:

In the struggle between groups for prestige and social position, the demands for deference and the protection from degradation are channeled into government and into such institutions of cultural formation as schools, churches, and media of communication. Because these institutions have power to affect public recognition, they are arenas of conflict between opposing status groups. Their ceremonial, ritual, and policy are matters of interest for status groups as well as for economic classes (Gusfield, 1963, p. 175).

Likewise, McRobbie and Thornton visualized changes in how moral panics developed thanks to media development. They noticed that, following decades of use of the concept of moral panics, the proliferation of viewpoints in society increased the scholarly debate over what is or is not a panic. They point out how the multiplication of media—with the increase in magazine titles and more diverse television and radio shows—allowed that voices that had once been silenced in media debate could portray their point of view in media: the “folk devils” who had been the targets of panics finally has access to media and were able to fight back against panics or even start their own micro-panics. Thus, the link made by moral panics theory between

media and control became outdated; moral panics, once seen as a sign of social crisis, now represented a continuous debate over what it means to belong to a national group, what it means to be part of society.

With the advent of information and communication technologies,⁶ scholars have shown great interest in how these new ways of interaction—through social networks, chats, forums, blogs or even comments sections in news sites—challenge social codes of right and wrong, reinforcing or creating new public problems and notions of deviance. Indeed, authors have shown how social movements, like feminist ones (Alvarez, 2014; Jane, 2017), have been using the internet vigorously to organize themselves. Mass self-communication could deepen the phenomenon that has been pointed out by Thornton and McRobbie (1995): deviants exposing their points of view, diversifying public discourse and image, and public problems being debated and decided by a larger number of people and groups, with fewer power differentials in play.

However, the usually predominant voices also have access to these ICT tools. The misogynistic vitriol received by women online—which has been well described by Jane (2016)—is an example. There is a common assumption that the internet would create a human community without prejudice, among equals, horizontal, without agonistic politics, where the individual, by himself and with technology, would be able to change the world (Turner, 2006). Maybe then the construction of public problems would be rationalized and decided independently of power differentials. As Lyon (2007) puts it, however, “[w]hy anyone ever dreamed that cyberspace would be primarily a realm of freedom defeats logic” (p. 99). About

⁶ “Information technology (IT/ICT): Sometimes also referred to as ‘information and communication technologies’, or ICT, information technology refers to the use of electronic systems for processing and communicating information. More broadly, IT may refer to networking, hardware, software or professionals working in these areas. These are primary technologies that facilitate surveillance today as they provide the infrastructure on which other systems, such as video, genetic or biometric, depend” (Lyon, 2007, p. 202).

power differentials online, boyd (2014) concluded that “the colorblind and disembodied social world that the internet was supposed to make possible has not materialized” (p. 23). Technology, after all, influences and is influenced by society, so it would be too much to expect that a change in media would solve the world’s inequalities.

In relation to who can gather means and support, ICTs allowed, in theory, that anyone could point out to the world a fact they find outrageous, mass self-communicating this fact and getting the attention of millions. However, out of the five cases observed here, in only one of them is it unknown how the shaming began or gained power (Stone). In the other three, the cases became known because the initiator had either a large following on social media (Biddle, in the case of Sacco, and Richards) or was a publicly known person (Rowling). In the Cooper case, lastly, it is not possible to know how big Melody and Christian Cooper’s following on social media was at the time of the events. Despite that, it is known that Soledad O’Brien, with hundreds of thousands of followers, published Cooper’s video, leveraging the shaming.

It is also important to consider who is being shamed when talking about power differentials. Who were Amy Cooper, Sacco, and Stone before being shamed? Anonymous or private middle-class women with neither media impact nor major economic resources. The scale of the public shaming was greater than their ability to resist it.

As in crusades, then, shamings succeed or fail based on the power differentials involved. These power disputes in shamings, however, must be understood in a different context than crusades, that of mass self-communication. Because of the new kind of interactions brought by it, it is possible to understand the fragmentation of participants, leaders and cadres, as well as their decentralized efforts. Since power is spread across a social network, a centralized movement like the Temperance movement does not make sense anymore: since everybody can

give an opinion and pursue the wrongdoer, leaders and cadres have a less important role. Support can come from anywhere and everywhere. And it is the possibility of instantaneous, easy and massive participation that makes shamings powerful.

c. Online imagined communities

By now, the reader must be wondering how I am able to compare very specific groups—moral crusaders and their formally organized associations—to random internet strangers. How can people who do not know each other, who have never met, who might not even be on the same continent, form a group interested in the same cause, willing to work together for its advancement? More specifically, what is understood here as the community of attackers who participate in an online public shaming? How can such a dispersed online group dispute values with other groups?

Here, it is necessary to understand a few characteristics of the online world that are paradoxical, but which allow the creation of *online imagined communities* (danah boyd, 2014).

On the one hand, social media makes situations of *context collapse* more frequent, says boyd (2014). “A context collapse occurs when people are forced to grapple simultaneously with otherwise unrelated social contexts that are rooted in different norms and seemingly demand different social responses” (p. 45). An example would be meeting your boss at the beach: different contexts that demand different social rules suddenly collide. In social media, context collapse becomes more common, in part because of the permanent nature of networked communications: it allows the context collapse to happen over time. In this way, last year’s vacation picture at the beach can be seen by one’s boss today. Context collapse brings together different audiences that might also have different moral values (A. E. Marwick, 2021; A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2011): “This phenomenon of context collapse means that groups with

diametrically opposed values—such as the far-left and the far-right, or the fat-positive and the fat-phobic—are visible to each other” (A. E. Marwick, 2021, p. 5).

On the other hand, social media facilitated the encounter of people with similar interests—even if these interests are illicit (Corriveau, 2010). Under the mass self-communication premise, the work of boyd (2014) is useful to understand how individuals with similar interests, values, and morals gather together, forming a *networked public*. Networked publics are

...publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the *imagined community* that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice (p. 8, my emphasis).

According to boyd (2014), then, networked publics provide the *spatial place* for people to gather and construct society, but it also means “a collection of people who understand themselves to be part of an imagined community” (p. 9). Boyd partially bases the concept of online imagined communities on Anderson’s (2006) characterization of the nation as an imagined community. It is easy to understand how a community can be imagined by referring to Anderson:

It is *imagined* because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (...). In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 2006, p. 8, emphasis in the original)

In this way, it is possible that Black progressive Americans—to use Sacco’s example—join together online through activism, culture, fandom, and discursive practices, forming an imagined community that shares interests and values—Black Twitter. Through shared interests, causes, discourses and spaces, social media users identify themselves and each other as belonging to a certain community.

However, due to context collapse, it is easy for these online imagined communities to clash with others that hold opposing values. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, during the year preceding Sacco's tweet, Black Twitter experienced numerous encounters with displays of racism that prompted a response from the community. These encounters allowed the community to construct the idea that a significant part of American society is still racist and needs to learn better ways of relating to racialized people.

In this way, this work refers to imagined online communities, in which participants understand that they share values with each other, despite never having met. Nonetheless, these values—anti-racism, anti-transphobia, respect for the war dead, anti-sexism, respect for privacy, anti-feminism—clash with the values and attitudes of other individuals and groups online, who are perceived as belonging to another, opposing imagined community. The crusade is, then, for one group to convert—or submit to—the other.

4.3. "...pushes for the creation of a rule..."

The moral crusades' target is the creation of rules that can fight the social problem, the evil being perceived in society; rules that define as deviant those who do not abide by the social "normalcy", and that makes social values more concrete (Becker, 1963). The crusader wants that evil to be avoided by everyone in all cases, and that is why abstract and general rules are adequate for their quest.

Besides noticing that the existence of a rule does not construct deviance by itself, meaning that a rule might exist without being strictly applied (Becker, 1963), it is also important to notice that rules exist not only to create deviance. Rules function as a symbol of the prevalence of certain values and certain groups (Gusfield, 1963). This search for affirming a group's values in society and for establishing a rule had been verified in the ban on pornography

(Zurcher Jr et al., 1971) the campaign against vice in general (Beisel, 1990), the fight against immoral textbooks (Page & Clelland, 1978) and the prohibition of alcohol (Gusfield, 1963). It is also important to notice that, in the literature of moral crusades, all the cases are of the creation of *legal*—state sanctioned—rules.

A shaming, on the other hand, at first sight, is directed towards a specific person acting in a concrete way—a fact located in time and space. Shamers notice something “off” in this concrete act:

- Sacco made a joke about AIDS that was considered racist;
- Stone took a picture making fun of an Arlington Memorial Plaque;
- Rowling contested the use of trans-inclusive language (“people who menstruate”);
- Cooper threatened to call the Police on a black man under false pretences;
- The PhyCon engineers made jokes with sexual innuendo in a professional environment; Richards overreacted and exposed the engineers without giving them a chance to defend themselves.

Therefore, in all these cases, there are concrete acts by specific persons. The initial, visible aim of online shamings, then, are these localized problems, not a generalized social matter that affects society in various ways. The shamers seek to inflict consequences on some specific person, responsible for a specific act. Could shamings be, then, simply a form of *rule enforcement* (Becker, 1963)?

To know if shamings are rule enforcement processes, a prior question must be answered: were there any rules to be enforced involved in these cases? What is observed in these cases is the presence of different rules in the same case: some legal, others purely social or ethical. Similarly, some of the rules have wide social acceptance, while others are widely disputed.

- Sacco made a racist and colonialist joke, which is, for part of the American society, intolerable.
- Racism was also the intolerable act in the Cooper case; moreover, in this case, the shamed person is also alleged to commit a misdemeanour (false report of a crime) (Bromwich, 2021). Furthermore, Cooper’s handling of her dog was also reproached.
- Stone disrespected a direct order on the Arlington Cemetery sign (“Silence and Respect”), which was considered also a disrespect of the war dead.
- Rowling advocated against inclusive language; her critics considered this to be intolerance of trans people.
- For Richards, the PlayHeaven engineers disregarded gender equality, while, for others, her acts were considered a disproportionate reaction to a harmless joke.

As we can see, a few legal rules are involved in these cases—Cooper’s false report of a crime and the Arlington plaque are the exceptions. And the problem is, however, neither the false report nor the plaque itself, but a deeper core *value* that is offended by the shamed’s act. What offended the shamers can be summarized as: being racist (Cooper, Sacco); disrespecting the war dead (Stone); disrespecting gender equality (Richards); overreacting (Richards); and disrespecting trans people (Rowling).

Observe that I use here the word *value*, not rule. As Becker (1963) explains, values are “...those vague and generalized statements of preference” (p. 130), such as *equality*, *liberty*, and *life*. A value is part of a symbolic system, and it is used as a guide to decide between open alternatives in a given situation; for example, the value *equality* might direct a certain community to ban slavery. Nonetheless, values are very general: in certain concrete situations

they provide several solutions, not a definitive one. In this way, many times the specifics of real-life problems have no answer in values. The value *life*, for example, does not give instructions on what to do with an individual who takes the life of another. Actually, values are so general that they might conflict with each other in a real-life situation, leaving a person without a clear guideline for the problem at hand. For example, in the case of a woman who wants an abortion, what prevails: *liberty* or *life*? Therefore, “Since values can furnish only a general guide to action and are not useful in deciding on courses of action in concrete situations, people develop specific rules more closely tied to the realities of everyday life” (p. 131).

It is important to observe that “Rules do not flow automatically from values”, as Becker explains (1963, p. 132). As a matter of fact,

People shape values into specific rules in problematic situations. They perceive some area of their existence as troublesome or difficult, requiring action. After considering the various values to which they subscribe, they select one or more of them as relevant to their difficulties and deduce from it a specific rule. The rule, framed to be consistent with the value, states with relative precision which actions are approved and which forbidden, the situations to which the rule is applicable, and the sanctions attached to breaking it (Becker, 1963, p. 131).

Abstract rules, indeed, make values concrete by commanding something to happen in the case that a hypothetical situation becomes real: *if X, then Y*—or, to use a previous example, *if someone kills another person (X), then they must be imprisoned (Y)*. The rule enforcement, however, is the application of this rule to a concrete situation, its application “in particular instances to particular people”, says Becker (1963, p. 133). The enforcement, then, imposes the consequence, the sanction, to the breaking of the rule.

In the analyzed cases, there is a direct enforcement of values: there are no specific rules stating what is forbidden or allowed, and what to do when someone disregards these instructions. In online public shamings, therefore, there are no rules being either enforced or created, but only

values being directly applied, in different ways, by masses of people acting with the same objective. The first visible object of shamings is, therefore, a direct enforcement of values.

But that does not mean that the symbolic use of crusades is not present at shamings, which will be clear when analyzing Sacco's case. Consider the context collapse of opposing imagined communities: users perceive the social, cultural and political landscape as hostile to the values being defended by them. Considering this perception, the shaming is not only an enforcement of the values but also their extension to other groups, which is what the moral crusades theorists classify as rule creation. In Sacco's case, for example, the users do not see their action as enforcing a consensus in America—it is quite the opposite: for the users, there are plenty of other racist people like Sacco. In this context, the shamer's actions counter a widespread racism that “can and must be defeated” (user 174). There is a space, then, that still needs to accept egalitarian values—Sacco's shaming and the discursive work involved around it are activities that are not reduced to her punishment but that are part of a large picture of rule creation. Shamers are not only trying to punish someone: they are also showing society in general what rules should be followed by all.

It might sound surprising to treat a case such as Sacco's as part of rule creation since these rules already exist. Not being racist, respecting Africa and not having prejudice against people living with HIV are well-known and largely followed rules—maybe even by a majority. However, going back to how moral crusades work, it is possible to see that rule creation is not a matter of literally creating rules out of nowhere, but of spreading them throughout all groups in society. See, for example, Gusfield's (1963) analysis of the temperance movement, which he classifies as a way of reaffirming the status dominance of rural, native, Protestant Americans in opposition to urban, non-Protestant immigrants. Zurcher et al. (1971) showed that moral

crusades against pornography (“conporns”) perceived that the “now generation”, “counterculture” and “the modernists” (that is, “radicals”, ‘modernists’, ‘young people’, ‘college students’, ‘hippies’, and ‘university professors’”—p. 224) were the threat to their traditional lifestyle. In Luker’s (1984) work, medical doctors used the anti-abortion campaign to establish their moral and scientific superiority in relation to folk doctors in the nineteenth century. Beisel (1990) showed how the upper class in Boston and New York had successful anti-vice movements as a reaction to the economic pressure coming from immigrants. Page and Clelland (1978) narrate the dispute between pro-textbooks cultural modernists and anti-textbooks cultural fundamentalists in the Kanawha County textbook controversy. In all these cases, what is visible is a group with certain values pursuing not the creation out of nowhere of a rule or value, but to impose their already existing rules and values upon others. In this aspect, the shamers also perceive their position and values as threatened and not respected by another part of society.

Differently from what the literature on moral crusades finds, however, the shamers do not pursue institutional recognition of their values. Indeed, in moral crusades like the Temperance movement, crusaders are looking for symbolic action from the government, meaning deference to them and degradation of the opposing group (Gusfield, 1963). Law, in a constantly negotiated social order, “...creates an illusion of cultural dominance”; public categories allow us to interpret the world and “it is in this fashion that version of social structure become taken as reality” (Gusfield, 1981, pp. 182–183). In all the cases described in the previous paragraph (Beisel, 1990; Gusfield, 1963; Luker, 1984; Page & Clelland, 1978; Zurcher et al., 1971), activists pursued official action that would favour their version of the social order—their rules and their values. Shamers do not seek state action, but they nonetheless are trying to mould social reality and impose the dominance of their values.

In this way, even though the core of the shaming is a movement of rule enforcement, it should be kept in mind that these are also movements of online imagined communities to extend their values to other parts of society; promoting rules is also a form of rule creation. Their moral indignation, furthermore, is not only directed at the single fact targeted in a shaming. The context of each of the cases demonstrates that the fact is, for the shamers, a representation of a larger evil, lurking around society. When Soledad O'Brien (2020) tweets "In case you're wondering if some people are willing to put the lives of others at risk by calling the cops on them, and lying about the threat. Imagine doing this KNOWING you are being recorded", she is affirming to her audience the reality of the problem and its recurrence. Melody Cooper, likewise, stated that she wanted to make sure that the same situation would never happen again coming from Amy Cooper (M. Cooper, 2020c). At first, it seems that Melody Cooper is addressing only this situation and person. She also stated, however, that "...every Black man is vulnerable. George Floyd ended up dead from police knee to his neck. This is why we speak out and post and stay vigilant" (M. Cooper, 2020a). That is, her denunciation intended more than stopping Amy Cooper, but stopping this type of situation in general. Biddle (2014b) was more explicit in his intentions of changing the world via Twitter when he shamed Sacco: "If we could only put one more wrongheaded head on a pike, humiliate one more bigoted sorority girl or ignorant Floridian, *we could heal this world*. Each, next outrage post was the one that would make a difference" (my italics). Similarly, for the shamers, Stone is not just someone who made a joke in bad taste, but also an example of the real problem, entitled and selfish youth in the US (user L1 in H, 2012). For the shamers, she disrespected veterans as a whole, war dead and the nation, and that is why they supported the petition to fire her (H, 2012). For the shamers, Rowling was not just manifesting about *The Guardian* news story about menstruation, but disregarding trans

rights (user R11). Twitter users tried to show her how a simple tweet could be related to violence against trans people and close the debate on their rights (users R8 and R10). Richards' (2013) intentions were also larger than addressing the PyCon incident: she did it “for the future generations as well”. As stated in her blog post, she needed to do something, otherwise little girls would have their love for programming stalled by such sexist attitudes (Richards, 2013g).

It would be a mistake, then, to understand online public shamings as either just attacks against a person or just the correction of a local offence. Shamings are also the extension of a deeply cherished belief by the shamers; they attack a person because that reaffirms and promotes the offended belief in society as a whole, not just in that case. In this way, online public shamings have as immediate objectives punishing a person, enforcing upon the punished person a sanction for the disrespect of a value. Nonetheless, the online shaming is also a means to affirm the importance of the said value within the online imagined community and *beyond it*: online public shamings, in this way, intertwine rule creation and rule enforcement. Thus, while their immediate target is a specific person or group, the culprit, they also aim at obtaining a change of behaviour of society as a whole.

4.4. “...because they believe in the content of the rule” in a righteous and absolutist way

Crusaders, finally, are those who believe in the content of the rule they are trying to create, as explained by Becker (1963). They do so because they believe the rule will fight a great evil that is present in society (alcohol, pornography, indecent books). This evil is absolute: the smallest infraction is a representation of it, and the crusaders should not tolerate even that. As Gusfield (1963, pp. 132–133) notices, “The object of change for the Temperance Movement has been the act of drinking in any quantity. Any pattern of drinking, even though moderate, violates

Temperance norms”. This view of the evil as absolute will manifest in two ways: in the attempt to impose the rules on *all* members of society and in accepting *all* means necessary to fight it.

i - The rule must be followed by all members of society

Indeed, to Mathieu (2005), the defining characteristic of moral crusades is that crusaders not only want to follow their rules by themselves, they also aim to impose ethical values and behavioural rules upon *all* members of society:

Pour le dire autrement, nous considérons que les croisades morales se distinguent d’autres formes de mobilisations en ce que leurs membres ne visent pas seulement à la défense des valeurs éthiques ou normes de comportement qui les caractérisent socialement ou culturellement, mais aussi, et surtout, à imposer celles-ci à l’ensemble de la population qui les entoure. Sur ce point diamétralement opposées aux revendications relativistes s’inscrivant dans les registres du « droit à la différence » ou de la reconnaissance d’identités minoritaires... (Mathieu, 2005, pp. 6–7)

In this way, for the crusader, it is not only necessary not to use alcohol, but also all other members of society must also be abstinent; it is not only necessary for the crusaders not to abort or perform an abortion, but no other patients and doctors can do so, either. The values and rules, in this way, must be followed by *all*.

Can minoritarian movements be moral crusades? For Mathieu (2005), as can be seen in the excerpt above, a crusade is characterized by the intention to impose values and behavioural rules of one group on others—what he calls absolutism—an objective opposed to those of minoritarian groups, which are to have their identities recognized and respected. This exception is not further developed by Mathieu.

Indeed, there are not many examples of minority’s crusades in the literature. Becker (1963) briefly cites anti-slavery abolitionism. Page and Clelland (1978) admit that minorities seeking higher status might engage in crusades, but give no examples. Gusfield (1963) states that

the desegregation movement was a status movement par excellence, but how it is different from the Temperance movement is not clear.

The differentiation of minority movements as non-absolutist, nonetheless, seems inadequate to me. It fails to perceive that minoritarian movements may also have absolutist pretensions. That is, they also want their values and behavioural rules to be followed by the population at large—the affirmation of their identity and the respect for their equal rights depends on the recognition, acceptance and following by other society's members. Indeed, equal respect for Black people depends on white folks not doing Twitter jokes about AIDS and Africa and not calling the police on someone because they are Black. Trans people need their pronouns used correctly and not mocked so their gender identity is respected. Minorities might depend on other groups' attitudes to have their rights respected and their identities recognized. Of course, this will not be all cases: Jehovah's Witness can abstain from blood transfusions without needing the rest of the population to abstain too. Nonetheless, in several cases the defense of a minoritarian right depends on the respect of that right by society as a whole. The differentiation made by Mathieu, in this way, seems fragile.

In all the cases seen here, shamers aim at making their cherished values and rules respected by all: the Arlington Memorial Plaque, for example, cannot be respected only by military personnel and their families; racism, sexism and transphobia are not acceptable from anyone.

ii - Absolutism as righteousness

Moreover, the belief in the content of the rule makes the crusader righteous and even self-righteous, believing in the correctness and superiority of their own cause, as explained by Becker (1963). Their mission is noble and humanitarian, even if imposed upon others. By *righteous*, I

mean that the shamer has a sense of moral correctness about their cause. They understand that what they are doing is good, virtuous—righteous, that is, morally correct—while the wrongdoing is seen as vile, low, morally wrong. This is an important distinction from other actors that might have opportunistic reasons to join an online public shaming, as companies trying to gain visibility with the commotion and make profits.

Indeed, in the cases examined here, it is possible to see how passionate shamers are about their cause, how offended they feel, and how focused on undoing and punishing the wrongdoer. Sacco was cursed and caused horror to some (Vingiano, 2013); Stone was accused of violating human decency (user L7); people presented arguments against Rowling’s views on trans issues, trying to show how she was wrong (users R4, R5 and R6); Richards (2013) used the protection of future women in tech to justify her tweet, and her detractors pointed out her disregard for other people’s careers (mr-hank, 2013); Cooper was accused of lying and putting a Black man’s life at risk (O’Brien, 2020). These and other manifestations gathered in the cases show that moral indignation is what mainly moves shamers.

This righteousness, however, can escalate into self-righteousness: “the quality of believing that your ideas and behaviour are morally better than those of other people” (Self-Righteousness, 2025). The self-righteousness of the participants is very clear in all the cases studied here. When commenting on the Change.org petition about Lindsay Stone, a shamer, first establishing their credentials to talk about the topic, and later diminishing Stone’s moral stature: “*I’m a Marine Deployed overseas. I’ve been in for over 15 years and have seen the best generation of service member give ALL for the freedom of our nation. Miss Lindsay Stone is indicative of the selfish and entitled generation that now resides within this country*” (H, 2012, my emphasis). In Rowling’s case, she is looked down on by being called a *disappointment* (user

R1) and advised to be a *better* feminist (user R6). Addressing the Central Park Birdwatching Incident, Melody Cooper (2020b), in her turn, first establishes Amy Copper’s moral inferiority as an entitled white woman (a Karen), then states the rule (dog must use leash), and the superior morals of her brother (who is just watching birds and who is polite): “Oh, when *Karens* take a walk with their dogs off leash ... where it is *clearly* posted on signs that *dogs MUST be leashed at all times*, and someone like my brother (*an avid birder*) *politely* asks her to put her dog on the leash” (my emphasis). However, the two most obvious examples of self-righteousness come from Sacco’s and Richards’ case.

About Sacco, Sam Biddle (2014b, my italics) said that, without much thought, he retweeted Sacco’s tweet to his 15,000 followers because it was a “...*natural* post” that would “...make people feel *good* and angry...” and that her tweet “...worded something *terrible*”⁷. An obviously terrible tweet, naturally causing the outrage of the good people on Twitter, and, in 48 hours, Sacco was done.

Richards, in her turn, said after tweeting the Pycon engineers’ picture that her attitude of defending digital equity “...made [her] feel like *Joan of Arc*, minus the visions” (Richards, 2013a, my emphasis). The self-perceived nobility of her intentions is also clear in a dialogue between Richards and one of her supporters. In it, Richards is portrayed as someone superior to the point of *teaching* others—even those who do not deserve it—about what is right or wrong (user A2). And, Richards (2013) responds: “thank you. *I did it for future generations* who will

⁷ The original blog post is: “At the time, I was editing Valleywag, Gawker’s tech-industry blog. As soon as I saw the tweet, I posted it. I barely needed to write anything to go with it: This woman’s job was carefully managing the words of a large tech-media conglomerate, and she’d worded something terribly.

It was a natural post. Twitter disasters are the quickest source of outrage, and outrage is traffic. I didn’t think about whether or not I might be ruining Sacco’s life. The tweet was a bad tweet, and seeing it would make people feel good and angry—a simple social and emotional transaction that had happened before and would happen again and again. The minimal post set off a 48-hour paroxysm of fury, an eruption of internet vindictiveness” (Biddle, 2014b).

attend as well”. This self-righteousness was also present on the other side of this shaming too. When threatening Richards’ employer SendGrid, the cyber-activist group self-identified as Anonymous announced that it “...ha[d] reviewed the situation and rendered *judgment* using their collective *wisdom and experience*” (Untitled, 2013, my emphasis).

These examples show a feeling of moral superiority. The culprits are seen as shameful people, who should be quiet and *learn*. The value, for the shamer, is *obvious* and can be easily understood, making the criticized act even more senselessly. The shamer, in turn, knows better, and will act to defend the jeopardized values, to defend underprivileged people who benefit from the rule, and fight the evils that endanger the present society and future generations. Shamers, as Biddle (2014b) says, will “*heal this world*”. It is not possible to conclude that this is the *animus* of the shamers, but the self-righteousness is clear at least in these examples.

The belief in the content of the rule brings, besides self-righteousness, also absolutism when identifying what is wrong and imposing consequences. It is noticeable, for example that, except for Cooper’s, all cases examined here started with a joke: Sacco’s AIDS tweet was supposed to mimic a racist person; the two PyCon engineers were making jokes with sexual innuendo when Richards overheard them; Stone made just another inside joke with her friend Jamie Schuh; and Rowling used irony to criticize the news title that addressed “people who menstruate”. None of these jokes presented an immediate danger or direct offence to anyone, but shamers understood these acts as manifestations of larger social problems, which they find unacceptable in every form. There is an absolute rejection to it, “...what he [the crusader] sees is truly and totally evil with no qualification” (Becker, 1963, p. 148). Cooper was the only person who engaged in a serious act and, even so, the initial matter was leashing a dog.

The absolutely evil nature of the criticized acts will be reflected in the absolute response given to them. For the evil disrespect of cherished values, the response is getting fired, being arrested, cursed at, threatened with rape and murder, losing social contacts, having the past investigated and the future jeopardized, and the same will happen to any close contact and whoever tries to defend the shamed person. The righteousness of the cause justifies whatever consequences imposed upon the shamed. This will become clearer when analyzing Sacco's case.

5. Recognizing Different Perspectives on Crusades

To conclude this section, I would like to acknowledge how my perspective on moral crusades differs from and enlarges the more typical approach in the sociological tradition. Truly, this analysis steps away from it as I do not necessarily associate crusades with *conservative* and *status maintenance* movements. To assume this position, I was greatly inspired by Mathieu's (2005) and Wood and Hughes (1984) work, as I detail below.

Firstly, it is hard to ignore the sociological tradition that associates moral crusades with conservative values. Among all the authors and crusades examined here, only Becker (1963) associates the concept of crusade with a real example of a progressive movement, in this single phrase: "Abolitionists were not simply trying to prevent slave owners from doing the wrong thing; they were trying to help slaves achieve a better life" (p. 149). Gusfield (1963) classifies desegregation as a status movement but differentiates it from movements such as the temperance without much explanation. All the other examples are demonstrations of conservative values being imposed: the temperance movement (Becker, 1963; Gusfield, 1963); anti-pornography efforts (Wood & Hughes, 1984; Zurcher et al., 1971); limitations on children's textbooks (Page & Clelland, 1978); the anti-abortion movement (Luker, 1984); and, anti-vice movements (Beisel, 1990).

Nonetheless, Mathieu (2005) argues that associating moral crusades with conservative values is vague and unstable, as a conservative movement might be considered progressive later and vice versa due to a change in context or participants. Mathieu exemplifies with the temperance movement and the nineteenth-century movement against the regulation of prostitution. The temperance movement was led by women who also fought for better work conditions and the female vote; the movement against the regulation of prostitution, in turn, was led by liberal feminists against police repression and by conservatives who defended the sanctity of marriage and of chastity.

Another common association is that of crusades and status maintenance campaigns. As explained by Wood and Hughes (1984),

The predominant sociological explanation ... focuses on incongruities in the stratification system with accompanying experienced dissatisfaction (status discontent). The argument suggests that moral reform supporters occupy social positions (e.g., "old middle class") for which there is a gap between the power and prestige they expect and that which they enjoy (p. 86).

Gusfield (1963) is one example. The author analyzes the Temperance movement as a "disinterested reform", that is, a movement that has its origins not in economic interests, but as a "moral reform as a political and social issue" (p. 2). More importantly, he analyses how this moral imposition was a way of reaffirming the status dominance of rural, native-born, Protestant Americans in opposition to urban, non-Protestant, immigrants. Gusfield writes that the incorporation of the crusaders' moral rules by society symbolizes the preference by the group and its lifestyle: "It settles the controversies between those who represent clashing cultures. The public support of one conception of morality at the expense of another enhances the prestige and self-esteem of the victors and degrades the culture of the losers" (pp. 4-5). Zurcher *et al.* (1971) arrived at similar conclusions while analysing moral crusades against pornography, that were formed to protect status dominance since traditional values were being challenged by counter-

cultural attitudes. Luker (1984), in turn, associated the anti-abortion campaign in the nineteenth century with medical doctors' superior technical and moral status in relation to their competition.

Mathieu (2005) criticizes such approaches, observing that they highlight the supposed objectives of the crusaders instead of giving due attention to the representations the crusaders build themselves:

Cette approche pêche par son fonctionnalisme, la portant à réduire le sens des croisades à leur vocation de conservation d'un ordre social inégalitaire. Relevant d'une vision quelque peu cynique de la vie sociale, elle tend à méconnaître—en opposant des intérêts « objectifs » supposés poursuivis par les acteurs aux représentations, disqualifiées a priori, qu'ils se font de leur propre action—la complexité des logiques présidant à l'engagement dans des mouvements de réforme morale que l'on ne peut sans danger résumer à leur seule ambition de normalisation, de discipline ou de domestication des classes populaires (Mathieu, 2005, p. 5).

As Wood and Hughes (1984) exemplify, “Alcohol and pornography are ‘substitutions,’ or ‘symbols,’ for the movement’s *real nature*, feelings of deprivation experienced by the ‘once-hads’ and the ‘never-hads’” (p. 88, my emphasis).

Moreover, such interpretations of moral crusades as status disputes fail to take into account other variables, such as religion and education, that might better explain the phenomenon, say Wood and Hughes (1984): “As opposed to status discontent explanations, [the authors] suggest that motivations to support moral-reform movements are an outgrowth of socialization processes and an expression of cultural value” (p. 89). Using quantitative research to take into account culture and socialization processes (age, sex, religion, and education being the most important variables), they conclude that “principle, beliefs and ideology” have a higher importance than “class and material interests in the development of support for moral reform” (p. 96). Similarly, Page and Clelland (1978) conclude that in movements like moral crusades, what is present is a symbolic dispute for ways of life, leading to “constant struggles for control of the means of symbolic production through which their reality is constructed” (p. 266), in other

words, “they are attempts to build and sustain moral orders which provide basic meaning for human lives” (p. 279).

In this work, it is necessary to recognize the varied nature of the social causes involved in the cases: left-wing, right-wing, progressive, conservative, involving race, gender, honour. These cases are just the ones narrated in detail at the beginning of this dissertation. If the focus is enlarged to include other known cases of online public shamings—some of which were considered when composing this study—even more moral positions would be included: price-gouging, due process, sexual morality and consent, journalistic ethics, the right to health and others. It is not possible here to affirm that all these issues involve status discontent or that they are the expressions of groups whose status is decaying. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe that all these cases involve disputes around values, morals and principles. This can include issues that are more purely symbolic (e.g., respect for the war dead) or that mix the symbolic and the material (equal respect for Black people in America). The bottom line is they all involve symbolic disputes over what values prevail in society.

In this dissertation, therefore, I do not assume “objective” purposes behind the movements against the shamed people. Instead, I take seriously but critically the values the attackers declare to be defending.

6. Conclusion: Shamings as Culture Degradation Ceremonies

Gusfield (1963), Becker (1963) and Zurcher et al. (1971) understand crusades as status disputes. Beisel (1990), on the other hand, sees the same phenomenon as class disputes, and Page and Clelland (1978) see defences of lifestyle. Independently of the root cause of these confrontations, the fact is that they symbolically occurred through the collision of the values held by different social groups. Maybe the reason for all these crusades was economic, or maybe

relative to status or lifestyle choices, or even a combination of all these factors, but the arena where the dispute took place was on the promotion or degradation of values existing in society. In every case, all moral crusaders encountered confronting groups within a specific community: the rural, Protestant America that did not want to give in to urban, immigrant Catholic habits (Gusfield, 1963); the local elites who did not want to lose political power to the growing Irish population (Beisel, 1990); conservative people faced with countercultural ideas (Page & Clelland, 1978; Zurcher Jr et al., 1971); and, doctors trying to make their profession look different from the competition (Luker, 1984). These were communities ridden with the presence of dissonant groups that engaged in symbolic disputes against each other.

In this sense, the concept of context collapse, brought by Marwick and boyd (2011), is useful. Context collapse potentially puts a fact under the scrutiny of different audiences with different values. What is important, for this work, is that plural and diversified online imagined communities get together, creating tension among social media users. Communities that dispute either status, class or lifestyle, communities that have competing values start to share online spaces.

Sacco, for example, made a joke that could be innocuous among her friends, but not among an anti-racist audience. The Play Heaven engineers were overheard by Richards, not their target public for dongle jokes; Richards, in turn, used her feminist audience to denounce a problem, but ended up being heard by misogynist groups. Stone published an inside joke with her friend, but that infuriated supporters of the military. Rowling published her joke on trans inclusive language to her millions of followers—those who agreed with her and those who do not. Finally, Amy Cooper's dog-leash fight was published to an anti-racist Twitter public, despite her not having any intention of facing them.

These communities had their own set of values and were presented with facts that directly contradicted these values; moreover, they were presented with facts that represented competing, contrasting or even menacing values compared to their own values. An act of a person, as demonstrated above, represents what this audience considers vile. It is, then, a challenge and a threat to their worldview and principles. And, as happens in crusades, this challenge demands the symbolical re-statement of the protected worldview.

As Gusfield (1963) explains, the public affirmation of a norm (and, in these cases, the value), has importance to the group who defends the norm because (1) it keeps the perception that the rules are still followed; (2) it attracts support from major institutions to the defence of the norm; and, (3) it is a symbolical statement of the worth of a sub-culture in relation to others. Crusades, to Gusfield, are a degradation of other people's culture as being lesser and shameful. The same can be said about shamings: they are processes through which a person and a case are used to symbolically reaffirm the shamers' values and to degrade the ones represented by the shamed.

Remembering Becker (1963), it is now clear that shamings are symbolic disputes over the enforcement of a value, in which opposing online imagined communities use the tools under their control to degrade a competing value. A group with an interest in enforcing the value gathers via mass self-communication, evaluating a problematic event. Their evaluation is righteous, even self-righteous, and has an absolute intolerance for small mistakes. This group uses the tools of power it has available to try to enforce the value—likes, tweets, retweets, online petitions, sleuthing, anonymous threats—to call the attention of authorities and employers. The success depends on their capacity to gather means and support, especially of a massive online

audience. If successful, they reaffirm the prominence of their value, not just to the shamed, but to all of those who watched the shaming.

This organization is less centralized and organized than in a crusade. Nonetheless, the attackers use online strategies to gather means and support for their cause. Moreover, as will become clearer in Chapter 7, grassroots movements, interest groups and elites all participate in the shaming. In this sense, all these social strata have *interest* in the shaming, interacting in complex ways to create deviance, enforce a rule and extend their values to other areas of society.

This chapter offered a general overview of how online public shamings, gathering various actors of different social strata, construct deviance, punishing an individual and setting a boundary for society as a whole. Nonetheless, little has been said about the specific mechanism of rule enforcement. Indeed, shamings have several specificities that have not been addressed yet when considering them as a form of individual punishment.

And, considering shamings as a form of individual punishment would not have been possible. As rule creation movements, the literature of moral crusades focuses more on that phase of deviance creation than in the enforcement of rules. As Becker (1963) points out, crusaders are not interested in the enforcement of rules. Another theoretical reference, then, is necessary to understand the other end of deviance creation. I will present this reference in the next chapter: the charivari.

CHAPTER 4: The Charivari

1. Introduction

As said in the previous chapter, online public shamings entail the dispute of values by online imagined communities, as well as the enforcement of a rule upon a specific wrongdoer. In this chapter, I will address this aspect of rule enforcement. The intention here is to create a model that explains how the enforcement works in online public shamings and what its features and characteristics are. To do so, I will use a phenomenon that, despite not using mass self-communication or even ICTs, resembles online public shamings in many aspects, including their use of shame and humour: the charivari.

Indeed, one could argue that online public shamings are nothing new but only an old punishment served in a contemporary medium. The pillory, dunkings, tarring and feathering, the branks, public executions, whippings and the scarlet letter were all public punishments that pre-existed online shamings and that involved humiliating events. Indeed, the comparison between online public shaming and old medieval rites of public humiliation and the media is common among scholars, though done *en passant* and without much research.

For example, O’Neil (2022) says that “Shame is a policing tool, and it has been one since the first class of humans roamed the savannas of Africa” (pp. 8-10) and then uses Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* to show how shame is used to achieve conformity. Frye (2021) investigates technological artifacts that make public shaming possible, comparing the pillory with social media posts; he also cites Hawthorne’s book and affirms that “The stigma by search engine remains as a kind of modern-day scarlet letter” (p. 129). Goldman (2015) does a genealogy of shaming punishments in America and suggests that social media shaming would be a valuable inclusion in the judiciary’s sentencing options. Solove (2010) states that “For

centuries—perhaps since the dawn of human society—people have spread rumors, gossiped about each other, and engaged in shaming for social transgressions” (p. 16). He also does the usual citation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

In the media, Ronson (2016) also makes a history of shaming punishments in America and cites *The Scarlet Letter* during his investigation of online humiliation. *The New York Times* talks about “scapegoatism” and cites Ronson and Hawthorne on the history and dismissal of penalties as spectacles (Mishan, 2020). CBC casually says that “...being cancelled has become the red scarlet letter of the social media age” (Kinos-Goodin, 2018). In *The Atlantic* magazine, a piece about online shamings is headed by an image of a pillory styled with the Twitter symbol; in its first paragraphs, the journalist summarizes Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

Despite usual, the comparison between social media and bygone shaming practices is more assumed than systematically explored. There is little analysis of the differences or resemblances of these historical practices with online shamings. Moreover, the comparisons, as seen above, usually use institutional shaming punishments, not those created and applied by the community itself.

Notwithstanding, it is understandable why such comparisons proliferate. Indeed, historical shaming punishments have elements that pop up as similar to those in online shamings: the public nature of the event, the participation of the community, the pleasure and joy involved in the practice, the ostracism that ensued, and the use of shame and humiliation as part of the punishment. I understand that these similarities and questions demand a much deeper exploration of shaming punishments as the rule enforcement aspect of online shamings.

In this chapter, therefore, I will investigate what shaming punishments were. Not all shaming punishments, though, only a specific one: the charivaris. Charivaris were a widespread

phenomenon since Antiquity, passing through the Middle Ages, losing steam in the nineteenth century, but persisting in some areas in Europe and North America until the twentieth century. They were a community-based punishment by which a local crowd ridiculed, mocked, harassed, beat, smeared, dunked—sometimes for days—a wrongdoer. I have chosen charivaris exactly because they happened independently from the State and Church—sometimes even against them. Moreover, even though there were occurrences of physical violence—not unusually, people ended up dead—their primary weapons were mockery, ridicule and humiliation. These aspects better match the five cases I am using in this dissertation, in which the State has minimal or no participation and no physical violence is involved.

It is hard to characterize charivaris in an absolute or homogeneous way, seeing that the practice extended through many centuries and places. Indeed, charivaris can be characterized not as *a* custom, but as “...a set of popular customs, variants of which have existed in many parts of Europe over many centuries, which characteristically involved a noisy, mocking demonstration usually occasioned by some anomalous social situation or infraction of community norms” (Ingram, 1984, p. 81). As said by Thompson (1993), “There is, indeed, a family of ritual forms here, which is European-wide, and of great antiquity, but the degree of kinship within this family is open to enquiry” (p. 467). The idea is, then, not to construct an absolute picture of the charivari as a single manifestation across time and place, a monolithic cultural expression, but a panorama of its variations. I will try, then, to provide a general picture of this family of traditions in Europe and North America while trying to keep local and temporal specificities clear. That is, using Thompson’s metaphor of family ritual forms, the intention is to describe the blood relations more than a specific sibling or a cousin. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that

my two main references here are E.P. Thompson (1993), who addresses the phenomenon in England, and Natalie Zemon Davis (1971), who deals with the French charivari.

Therefore, keeping in mind that the main objective here is to allow a comparison to contemporary shamings, I will first define what charivaris were and the common nomenclature used to denominate them. Then I will focus on four aspects of the charivaris: their social uses; their power relations; their publicity; and their forms of punishment. Finally, I will briefly explore why charivaris did not survive Modernity.

2. Definition, Description and Nomenclature

On March 1618, a Sunday night, several inhabitants of the town of Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire, England, showed up uninvited at the house of William and Margaret Cripple, as recounted by Kent (1983). The couple, new in town, was suspected of cohabitating without being married, and the crowd wanted to punish them for sexual incontinence. The people, which were “armed with long pikes, staves, daggers, swords, pitchforks, halberts and other engines and weapons as well invasive as defensive” (p. 72), and disguised in masks and costumes, dragged the Cripples out of bed and

...led them through the streets ‘with greate noyce and with ringing of cow bells, basons, candlesticks, frying pannes and with the sounde of a drumme’, all the while ‘crying allowd a whore and a knave, a whore, a whore’, and casting ‘dourte and mier of the streets’ upon them. This noisy gathering brought people out of their houses to see what was happening, and according to the Cripples some four hundred inhabitants had been present to observe the unjustified proceedings against them (p. 73).

The Cripples were then put on the stocks, where they stayed for at least half an hour, says Kent (1983). According to the couple’s account, the inhabitants of Burton kept shouting, cursing and throwing dirt on them while imprisoned, besides urinating on their heads. After that, the couple alleged, they were dragged around the streets for hours until they were finally liberated and helped by other people to get home. Once there, the Cripples found out that the house had been entered, and that £5 and other goods had been stolen. The Cripples would leave town the

following day but eventually come back. They also petitioned at the Court Star Chamber against their attackers.

The Cripples story is by no means an exception in Ancient, Medieval, Early Modern, and even Modern history. Indeed, situations like this have happened since Antiquity, throughout the Middle Ages and even with remnants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (N. Z. Davis, 1971; Favretto, 2015; Macedo, 2005; Palmer, 1978; Thompson, 1993), happening all over Europe and also in Canada and United States (Alford, 1959; Greenhill, 2010; McKnight, 2005; Thompson, 1993). Many different terms have been used to name the tradition: in England, *Rough Music*, *Skimmity*, *Skimmington* or *Riding the Stang*; in France, *The Donkey Ride* or *Charivari*; in Spain, *Cencerrada*; in Italy, *far campanate* or *Scampanate*; in Germany, *Katzenmusik* or *Eselritt*; in the Basque country, *Zinzarrotsa* or *Galarrotsa* (Alford, 1959); *Vozhdenie Vora* in Russia (Frank, 1987); and several names in North America: *Shivaree*, *Chivaree*, *Banjo*, *Saluting*, *Serenade*, (Greenhill, 2010), “...*Tin-Panning*, *Belling*, *Homing*, *Bull banding*, *Skimmelton* or *Calathump*” (Palmer, 1978, p. 22). However, as Thompson (1993) explains, the French term *charivari* is “...descriptive of the whole genus” (p. 467)⁸.

⁸ Thompson (1993) observes that “In the international scholarship *charivari* has won acceptance as the term descriptive of the whole genus. In 1972 I followed this example by entitling a study published in France “*Rough Music: Le charivari anglais*”. The difficulty of this assimilation soon became apparent. For the term ‘charivari’ arouses inapposite expectations and constructs the subject according to a French problematic, with its strong emphasis upon charivari as occasioned by second marriages, and also upon the role of unmarried youths. When a learned round table on charivari was convened in Paris in 1977, some visitors from Britain, Germany and Italy had reason to feel that the terms of discourse were ‘francocentric’ and inapposite to their own national scope, and to say that a French typology has become dominant outside of France’s own borders – and is exported with the word – is also to pay tribute to France’s strong traditions in folklore, ethnology and anthropology. One could not imagine, in the 1970s, a round table of international scholars convening in a British university to discuss rough music, and one should applaud the French intellectual initiative.

“But, while applauding, one should resist inappropriate constructions. Perhaps, one should resist, for most purposes, the term ‘charivari’ altogether (unless one is working on French materials) and should stick to ‘rough music’ for English materials?” (pp. 467-468).

In this exposition, my effort is to present charivaris in those aspects that united the whole genre. Firstly, the intention here is to gain a general understanding of the tradition by investigating its different manifestations. Secondly, I believe it would be confusing to the reader if I used a different denomination every time I examined an aspect of the phenomenon in a different time and place. For these reasons, despite Thompson’s question, I have decided to use the general term *charivari* throughout this text, pointing out specific names if necessary.

The charivari would start with community members gathering around the culprit's house, making *rough music* "...with pots and pans, whistles and bells" (Alford, 1959, p. 505), producing "...raucous, ear-shattering noise, unpitying laughter, and mimicking of obscenities" (Thompson, 1993, p. 469). Then, a variety of mocking, shaming practices could ensue. The culprit themselves or a proxy (a neighbour or an effigy) could be mounted on a donkey facing backwards or on a ladder or pole to be paraded around town, followed by the rough music; a re-enactment of the culprit's wrongdoing could be staged (Alford, 1959). Other variations could also occur, being more "...elaborate, and might include... masking and dancing; elaborate recitatives; rough mime or hunt; or (frequently) the parading of burning effigies; or, indeed, various combinations of all of these" (Thompson, 1993, p. 469). Among Russian peasantry, for example, it was usual, especially in the case of women, to strip naked the culprit and make them parade around town; men would be stripped, tarred and feathered; thieves had the product of the theft hang around their necks; and the crowd demanded the payment of vodka (Frank, 1987). Italian *scampanatas* could involve smearing the culprit's house with garbage or manure and shaving the culprit's hair and beard (Favretto, 2015). In the village of Laleu, France, ducking was the penalty for adultery (N. Z. Davis, 1971). In New Orleans, LA, ducking and paying drinks to the crowd were also part of charivaris (McKningt, 2005). Furthermore, besides the traditional forms of each place and time, there was also space for improvising in each charivari, like in a nineteenth-century North American episode, when a crowd of 300 people hoisted a fifty-pound pig "...through the bedroom window and into the honey-moon chamber..." of a John Glenville (Palmer, 1978, p. 23).

3. Characteristics

This peculiar tradition was very complex and varied, and several aspects of it could be explored, such as its dramatic forms (Thompson, 1993) or the special part youth groups played in it (N. Z. Davis, 1971). Here, though, I will focus on four characteristics that might help relate it to online shamings: (1) its social uses; (2) the power relations involved; (3) the many ways by which charivaris were *public* punishments; and. (4) the use of violence and shame as sanctions.

3.1. Social Uses of the Charivari

The social uses for charivaris varied greatly. Indeed, they were a custom used for private matters such as marriages, but also public ones, like wrongful condemnations; they could enforce social structures, like the patriarchal family, by targeting scolds and husband-beaters, but they could also ensure social change, as when used by protesting factory workers (Alford, 1959; Bettoni, 2012; N. Z. Davis, 1971; Dobash & Dobash, 1981; Favretto, 2015; Greenhill, 2010; Greer, 1990; Ingram, 1984; Palmer, 1978; Thompson, 1993). Charivaris could also be opportunistically used, having nothing to do with community morals but with local powers using the crowd to gain some advantage (Thompson, 1993).

Alford (1959) listed domestic situations as the main reasons for the occurrence of a charivari in Europe:

First the remarriage of a widow or widower, especially if the new partner is of a very different age.

Second the beating of a man by his wife.

Thirdly comes adultery on the part of the wife; in former times and now again in modern times, like conduct on the part of the husband may also bring the punishment (p. 506).

Other reasons would also precipitate a charivari, like the sexual activities of unmarried people (Alford, 1959). Ingram (1984) also points out that "...domestic situations, especially female domination" (p. 90) were the leading cause for charivaris in England, even though other

causes could also be present. Likewise, Davis (1971) states that youth groups in sixteenth-century France had jurisdiction over young people, wedding ceremonies, and, above all, married couples. These youth groups could charivari those couples who did not have a child within a year, adulterous behaviour, and female dominance in the marriage. Dobash and Dobash (1981) explain that charivaris were used to enforce patriarchal relationships, which meant not only punishing couples who allowed women to dominate the marriage but also men who exaggerated their power of disciplining their spouses. In Canada, charivaris in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were generally used to show disapproval of certain relationships “between older folks, those of different ages, involving a widow and/or widower, interracial couples, or inter-religious couples” (Greenhill, 2010, p. 4).

Moreover, Palmer (1978) points to the use of charivaris in Canada because of a “jealous eye toward property, or resentment of those who attempted to establish themselves as superior in a community of equals” (p. 32). In this way, a man in Ontario was charivaried in 1881 to drive him off his land, allowing the charivari organizers to access it. Likewise, in 1884, a couple of girls were charivaried for not inviting the village youth to a party. In Russia, even though charivaris were used in domestic cases, they were mostly directed to control petty theft or when someone disobeyed the local assembly’s decision on a criminal case (Frank, 1987).

Despite the prevalence of domestic themes (the choice of spouses, the dominance of women in the marriage, not bearing children, for example), charivaris were also employed for other purposes. In sixteenth-century France, urban abbeys (a sort of youth group) targeted more than domestic situations with their charivaris, and gained political colours, as Davis (1971) explains. Indeed, charivaris were used in that period to protest against magistrates, the king, the king’s officers, the high price of bread, taxes, and even religious war. An example of political

resistance through the language of charivari happened in Saint-Just d'Avray in the eighteenth century: "The men blackened their faces and dressed up as women and then attacked the surveyors measuring their lands for a new landlord. When questioned later, all the villagers said the attackers were 'fairies' from the mountains who came from time to time" (p. 69). In England, even domestic charivaris could gain a political connotation: they would be more energetic if targeting someone of authority, being open to "...anti-authoritarian or anticlerical intentions", says Ingram (1984, p. 91). Ingram gives a few examples, including a 1602 charivari against the parish vicar of Waterbeach. Having beaten his wife, the vicar was charivaried not only for the beating but also for "'defacing the ministry'" (p. 91). Charivaris with no mention of domestic situations, nonetheless, were rare. Notwithstanding that, Thompson (1993) makes clear, that even though English charivari was conservative and linked to domestic situations, it "...was always potentially subversive, with its rites of inversion, its blasphemies and obscenities... it could rapidly acquire a polemical social meaning" (p. 524-525).

In other uses, workers used charivaris against strikebreakers and employers in nineteenth-century England (Thompson, 1993). A similar phenomenon persisted into the twentieth century in Italy, as noted by Favretto (2015). In fact, Italian factory workers compelled foremen and middle-level employees to march among them, while being insulted and subjected to mock trials and expulsion from the factories. Additionally, effigies and donkeys were used, and it was common to smear factories with manure.

It is possible to conclude, therefore, that charivaris had a multitude of uses, even within the same geographical area and time frame. Usually, these uses were domestic, but they could become political.

Should these multiple uses lead to the conclusion that charivaris were a mere form that contained all kinds of functions, which were solely dependent on the context and protagonists' understanding of their act? Or could all these different functions be reduced to only one, an original function, homogeneously corresponding to the rite?

Both positions are considered in the debate between Ginzburg (1982) and Thompson (1993) about the relationship between the form and the function of the charivaris. Thompson opposed Lévi-Strauss' (1964) understanding of charivaris. In synthesis, Lévi-Strauss understood that charivaris are comparable to the rites associated with eclipses. In both cases, there is "d'un part dans la rupture de la chaîne syntagmatique, d'autre part dans l'intrusion d'un élément étranger à cette même chaîne" (p. 294). That is, there is a rupture of an expected union (between men and women of an equivalent age and status in the charivari; or between the sun and the moon, the earth and the sky, in the eclipse) and the capture of one of the union's elements by the foreign element (the widow who marries a young person in the charivari; the monster which consumes the celestial body in the eclipse). As Ginzburg explains, "The implicit parallelism between society and the cosmos, between marriage exchanges and relations between the stars, brings to light the latent function of the charivari", using the form to define the function (p. 164). Thompson, on the other hand, understood that the researcher shouldn't look for a deeper meaning of the charivari, beyond that conceived by its protagonists. In sum, to Lévi-Strauss the rite defines the function, independently of the social context; for Thompson, the context defines the function and, to a certain point, the rite: "For both, to be sure, the charivari is a kind of 'social hieroglyphic': but at this point the positions diverge again, because for Lévi-Strauss the charivari reveals a series of seemingly unchanging logical and metaphorical oppositions, while for Thompson the change in the functions performed by the charivari is an indication of a profound

change that has taken place in the value system of a given society” (Ginzburg, 1982, p. 165). Ginzburg (1982), then, proposes that the two approaches are actually compatible with each other and should illuminate each other. To Ginzburg, even though one should not simply deduct the function from the form, one should also not ignore the meaning of the form. Ginzburg demonstrates this by researching the first appearances of the charivaris. The author shows how charivaris have mythical and ritualistic origins with specific functions, which later become heterogeneous and context-dependent. Thompson (1993), in turn, accepted Ginzburg’s criticism and re-elaborated his theory.

Thompson (1993) suggests, then, in relation to charivaris in England (*rough music*), that these have a multitude of functions, being better understood, in this way, as a “...*symbolic vocabulary* of the time, capable of being expressed in sentences with different meanings” (p. 509—my emphasis). However, this is a vocabulary composed of *rites*, for which the mythic origins had been lost, and yet still they “...powerfully evoke mythic meanings even if only fragmentarily and half-consciously understood” (p. 509). These rites, nonetheless, are not copied and reproduced mindlessly by the people; the people select and use the rites for their own purposes and reasons. That was what allowed charivaris to have so many different functions, maintaining in common the symbolical language of the ritual. Though using the same language, then, rough music could be progressive or conservative, domestic or political.

It is visible, then, that across many times and places, charivaris had a multitude of functions, with Thompson (1993) and Ginzburg (1982) pointing out that these functions partially depended on mythical meaning and partly depended on context. In this work, I am not addressing online shamings as a sort of heir to charivaris, so it does not interest me to investigate mutual mythical meanings. Nonetheless, it is worth observing how online shamings also have a

multitude of subjects, sometimes serving conservative crowds, sometimes progressive. Surprising subjects might kindle online shamings, such as Stone's picture at the Arlington Memorial. Online shamings seem to provide, like charivaris, a vocabulary of practices (doxxing, shaming, memes, humour, calls to be fired, etc.) that can be adapted to multiple topics.

3.2. Balance of Forces Within the Community

A second characteristic worth noticing in charivaris that relates to online shamings is their horizontality: they are a form of punishment performed by community members against community members, not by a local government or employer against a citizen or employee. As stated by Kent (1983), besides counting with local authorities and courts, "...villagers also took it upon themselves to punish offenders in their midst, subjecting those whose conduct was deemed anti-social or immoral to public censures such as 'rough music'..." (p. 70). In this way, the "...charivari can be understood as an extra-legal mode of social control", "[n]ever linked with formal governmental actions" (Greenhill, 2010, pp. 14 and 17). Or, as said by Thompson (1993), rough music "...is a property of a society in which justice is not wholly delegated or bureaucratized, but is enacted by and within the community", and it "...belongs to a mode of life in which some part of the law belongs still to the community and is theirs to enforce... It indicates modes of social self-control and the disciplining of certain kinds of violence and social offence..." (p. 530). Two aspects deserve attention within this horizontality: (1) the relationship with the official power; and, (2) the necessary favourable context within the community for a charivari to happen.

i - Charivaris and Official Power

The relationship between charivaris and official power was complex, varying according to time and place: communities' rules sometimes overlapped the State's and the Church's;

authorities could ignore, oppose or enforce the charivari; and charivaris could have political use—either as an oppositional force or as an endorsement of the reigning powers. Indeed, Kent (1983) shows that royal and communitarian justice overlapped in seventeenth-century England, for example. There, although charivaris usually targeted offences against social morality, not crimes, sometimes the targeted offences could be predicted in law and punishable by the State. In that case, proceeding to a charivari would mean a competition between jurisdictions, the popular and the official. The use of popular justice over the official one was due to suspicion about ecclesiastical courts and the “...close social relationships within local communities, and of self-regulatory mechanisms to which these gave rise” (p. 81). Despite this overlap, higher magistrates sometimes condoned charivaris, and lesser officials not only approved but even participated on such occasions. Usually, however, the English charivari was started without approval from authorities “and was sometimes conducted in opposition to them” (Thompson, 1993, p. 482). In Scotland and Wales, rough music episodes sometimes happened as “...a prelude to a court case, as if it was imperative that the community had their say on a given matter, before the issue was dealt with in the formalised legal sphere” (Nash & Kilday, 2010).

In industrial Italy, charivaris went beyond the overlapping with state jurisdiction or being conducted against legal prohibitions: they were used for “symbolically challenging authority and power relationships within factories”, says Favretto (2015, p. 240). Italian workers fought not only for better wages but also to change authoritarian factory rules and gain power in production. On the other hand, in North America, as recounted by Palmer (1978), charivaris were best understood as pre-political forms, “...lacking in conscious, political direction” (p. 15), more used to endorse an event or a politician. That did not mean, nevertheless, that Canadian and American authorities tolerated charivaris: they were “...resolutely opposed by magistrate and police” (pp.

24-25), perhaps because, in that region, charivaris usually ended up in disorder, with people killed or maimed.

Online shamings also have multiple ways of relating to authority, sometimes working without resorting to authority, sometimes working against it and, at times, looking for support from it—and, as narrated by Trottier (2018), they are used by authorities to further punishment. In Cooper's case, for example, the police were called in to verify the false report of a crime. Furthermore, employers are usually pressed to take action against shamed people—which is Sacco's, Stone's, Cooper's and Richards' case. As it will be shown in Sacco's case, this pressure on employers was an important feature of her shaming—one could even say that getting Sacco fired was the shamers' main objective. On the other hand, state power had minimal participation in it, not imposing any sanctions, whilst some shamers used the case to gain visibility for their social causes.

Trottier (2018), on the other hand, highlights instances of online shaming in which the punishment imposed by the state is furthered by social media users. Trottier's (2018) initial example is of how Dutch police broadcast on television the footage of a theft. The thief, a 68-year-old woman, turned herself to the police, but the footage also led to her online shaming. The woman ended up killing herself. Examples such as this warrant a more careful examination of the relationships between shamers and the state. As I will address in Chapter 7, the State must be considered as a potentially interested actor within a shaming.

ii - Charivaris, Local Context and Power Relations within the Community

The horizontality of charivaris meant not only a complicated relationship with authorities but also that they depended on the balance of forces within a community. Not only the offence

but the inter-community relationships were crucial for the happening of a charivari (Ingram, 1984):

... the essential attribute of rough music appears to be that it only works if it works: that is, if (first) the victim is sufficiently “of” the community to be vulnerable to disgrace, to suffer from it: [*sic*] and (second) if the music does indeed express the consensus of the community—or at least of a sufficiently large dominant part of the community ... to cow or to silence those others who—while perhaps disapproving of the ritual—shared the same disapproval of its victim (Thompson, 1993, pp. 490–491 *Italics in the original*).

Indeed, charivaris were highly connected to the local context. To be a victim of charivari, it was not enough to be involved with wrongdoing: the dislike from the community needed other sources, and the tensions leading to it could simmer for a long time before boiling over (Thompson, 1993). In the Cripples case, for example, the “...censure was not a sudden event, but apparently the culmination of several weeks of growing suspicion of the couple and mounting antagonism toward them; and certain social traits as well as their social conduct probably contributed to their unpopularity” as recounted by Kent (1983, p. 75). The couple, in fact, was new in town, attracting more attention to their demeanour. They allegedly introduced themselves as siblings, an unusual household structure for the time, attracting suspicion. They were probably from a less favoured economic situation, and it is possible that William Cripple suffered from some sort of handicap. Furthermore, the couple’s behaviour also attracted reproach. William apparently courted a local servant, and Margaret offered the girl 40 shillings to marry him. And there were rumours that young men resorted to the Cripple’s house, unfortunately for Margaret’s reputation. It is possible to see, then, that the Cripples were charivaried not simply for co-living outside of marriage but due to a whole context of suspicion and hostility from the local community.

As I will show in Sacco’s case, this is an important difference between charivaris and online shamings. In the latter, the wrongdoing becomes known in an almost total absence of local context. Shamed people like Richards, Stone, Sacco, and Cooper are only known through

that small piece of information—the wrongdoing. As it is visible in Sacco’s, Richards’ and Cooper’s cases, further information is searched *a posteriori*, confirming the judgement that they are outsiders, deviants: Sacco’s previous tweets, Richard’s sock joke, Amy’s dog’s injuries—all information found after the wrongdoing that made the shamers’ characterization of the shamed even stronger. Nonetheless, almost no other information from the person’s context and character is known before the accusation during an online shaming.

Moreover, as seen in Chapter 2, the participation of people outside the original context is actually necessary for an online shaming: the wrongdoing must become known outside its original circle and attract the judgement of “internet strangers” to become a shaming. Thus, in a preliminary analysis, online shamings differ from charivaris in relation to the importance of local context.

The Cripple’s case shows, in this power balance, that not only the inter-community relationships but also the larger social structure should be considered. Groups with lower social status, like women, were more prone to be charivaried; the custom was used to keep patriarchal relationships in place (Dobash & Dobash, 1981). Different groups could also suffer from different types of rituals. While women could be submitted to the branks in Scotland, men did not; in England, on the other hand, women would be less submitted to charivaris and would usually be charivaried via effigies, not in person (Nash & Kilday, 2010). Likewise, people of superior social status were hardly the target of direct ridicule: charivari, in their case “...was in the form of highly ironic and humorous abuse which softened the blow and protected the performers through satire” (Dobash & Dobash, 1981, p. 566). The same attention should be given to online shamings since there is research showing that marginalized groups are more vulnerable to online abuse (A. E. Marwick, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2024).

In this way, charivaris depended on the balance of forces within the community to come to life; the local context should disfavour the target, who would have weakened relationships with their fellow inhabitants, allowing the charivari to occur. Larger social structures also determined who could be charivaried or not. Authorities could oppose, not interfere with, or favour the charivari. Charivaris could also become political, even though that was not the case in all places.

3.3. Publicity

A third characteristic of the charivaris worth noticing is their publicity. Referring to both formal and informal punishment, Thompson (1993) states that “Until the early nineteenth century, publicity was of the essence of punishment. It was intended, for lesser offences, to humiliate the offender before her or his neighbours, and in more serious offences to serve as example” (p. 480). *Publicity*, here, must be understood as a manifestation of the *dramatic form* of the charivari: public in the sense that the punishment constituted a form of street theater: “As such, they are immediately adapted to the function of publicizing scandal” (p. 478). *Public*, in this way, means the visibility of the wrongdoing (the publicization of disgrace) to the crowd on the street, serving as an example to the community. The visibility to the crowd and its participation are essential to a punishment that uses *shame* as its main tool.

This fact is well reported concerning official punishment by authors like Foucault (1975), Ignatieff (1978) and Gatrell (1996), who shows how the crowd, the audience, was necessary for the punishment. Punishment was public, firstly, as a political ritual through which power is manifested (Foucault, 2014). The spectacle of punishment also served as an educational moment of deterrence for the crowd “through brutalizing threats of violent retribution, to *exempla* of damnation” (Merback, 1999).

Dans les cérémonies du supplice, le personnage principal, c'est le peuple, dont la présence réelle et immédiate est requise pour leur accomplissement. Un supplice qui aurait été connu, mais dont le déroulement aurait été secret n'aurait guère eu de sens. L'exemple était recherché non seulement en suscitant la conscience que la moindre infraction risquait fort d'être punie; mais en provoquant un effet de terreur par le spectacle du pouvoir faisant rage sur le coupable... (Foucault, 1975)

The deterrence entailed by such rituals depended on the effective participation of the crowd, of its legitimizing support of them: "...the processional to the gallows and the execution itself were supposed to be a carefully stage-managed theatre of guilt in which the offender and the parson acted out a drama of exhortation, confession and repentance before an awed and approving crowd" (Ignatieff, 1978, p. 21). So, on the one hand, there are public ceremonies of punishment enacted by the State in a show of power and in the hope of deterrence through terror, which depended on the public's acceptance and participation.

On the other hand, and as mentioned above, for Thompson (1993), the public street theatre of the charivari served to humiliate and to serve as an example. Indeed, Charivaris had this theatrical aspect of making known by all what was previously only rumour: they were "...the total publicity of disgrace", says Thompson (1993, p. 487). Indeed, rough music meant that social pretences that allowed neighbours to co-exist were lifted, allowing the entire community to judge someone. "After that, there is no more mist. The victim must go out into the community the next morning, knowing that in the eyes of every neighbour and of every child, he or she is seen as a person disgraced" (p. 488). As explained by Ingram (1984), charivaris were "...destroyers of privacy" (p. 99), imposing over the individual the system of values of the community.

The publicization of scandal is closely related to the fact that public shaming was the main instrument of punishment used in charivaris. Humiliating means to expose someone to shame, says Nussbaum (2004). Humiliation is "...the active, public face of shame" (p. 203), and it "...typically makes the statement that the person in question is low" (p. 204). In charivaris,

indeed, the intention was to humiliate, to show the weaknesses of whoever went against the community's standards (Macedo, 2005), and that was done by the humiliating ritual of publicizing what was once hidden. I will analyze in more detail how humiliation played a role in charivaris in a following section. For now, it suffices to say that by publicizing scandal, communities rectified wrongdoers and exemplified to all the consequences of bad behaviour, allowing, thus, the harmonization of social relations (Nash & Kilday, 2010).

The street theatre of charivaris was also a self-regulating form of rectifying misbehaviour and enforcing community norms, even though the chosen medium was the disruption of social order (McKningt, 2005). Ingram (1984) explains that charivaris could address crimes and wrongdoing proscribed or not by law, resting "...on a folkloric tradition that the populace had the right to supplement the legal system". This meant that the charivari was permeated by the "quasi-legal purpose" (p. 93) of regulating general behaviour, not just of the charivaried person:

Thus one of the actors in a riding at Haughley and Wetherden (Suffolk) in 1604 claimed that their object was that "not only the woman which had offended might be shamed for her misdemeanour towards her husband [in beating him] but other women also by her shame might be admonished [not] to offend in like sort" (p. 93).

In this way, despite the raucous activity of charivaris, participants viewed them as a legitimate way of improving the culprit and reminding peers and neighbours of the consequences of engaging in activities that went against the community's rules (Nash & Kilday, 2010). In the same way, Davis (1971) states that youth groups responsible for charivaris in sixteenth-century France were socialized to be "conscience of the community by making them the raucous voice of that conscience" (p. 55), and these groups were one of the ways by which "peasant community defended its identity against the outside world" (p. 57). In this way, charivaris, extended the notion of rule enforcement, which was not only an application of sanctions upon a wrongdoer: it also had an exemplary function of regulating behaviour within the community.

As a final note on charivari's theatrical character, it is interesting to notice that, paradoxically, the publicization of scandal did not mean that the executors presented themselves without disguise. Actually, anonymity among participants was usual, achieved through the use of masks and costumes (Kent, 1983; Thompson, 1993). The intention was to protect the offenders from any form of retaliation from the offended and project the charivari as a communal action, not as the quarrel of a few individuals against the charivaried (Kent, 1983).

As said in Chapter 2, online shamings are also *public* in the sense that they depend on a crowd that was not involved in the original context in order to shame and humiliate the culprit. It is the exposure to masses of people out of the original context that makes the wrongdoing visible to all (publicizing disgrace) and exposes the person to punishment through shaming. As said by Melody Cooper (2020c), “*I wanted folks to know what happened to make sure it never happens again from her*” (my emphasis). It also allows the case to be treated as an example to the community, showing what kind of behaviour is disapproved of.

i - Searching for Legitimacy in and Mocking Public Ceremonies:

As Thompson (1993) explains, charivaris were a form of “street theater” in societies that heavily relied on theatrical forms to regulate themselves. Truly, these were societies that counted on “... the solemn procession, the pageant, the public exhibition of justice or charity, public punishment, the display of emblems and favours, etc. [*sic*]” (p. 478). These public forms of expression, especially the public execution, “...irradiated popular culture” (p. 480). Thus, charivaris adopted this official, theatrical vocabulary to publicize scandal, humiliating the victim and serving as an example to the neighbours. Moreover, by using official symbols to do so, charivaris simultaneously asserted their own legitimacy and mocked authority. The parade of rough musicians, effigies and carts assumed what Thompson calls an *anti-processional* form. On

the one hand, they used the vocabulary of official parades from the State, the Church and the civic ceremonial, trying to portray legitimacy and authority. On the other hand, however, the rough music procession *mocks* the official one. In this way, rough music “...may be ambivalent and move between the mockery of authority and its endorsement, the appeal to tradition and the threat of rebellion” (p. 482). An example of a mocking imitation of official forms of penalty could be seen in the French-Canadian charivari: the fines imposed by Church and State would also be imposed through charivari as punishment, and half of the profits would go to charity and the other half to pay for the charivari expenses, “i.e., celebratory drinks in the tavern” (Greer, 1990, p. 31). In an important work, Davis (1971) analyzed this mocking, challenging, and oppositional nature of charivaris using Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) *carnival* concept.

Davis’ analysis is not entirely related to the object of the present section: while at this point I am addressing the publicity of charivaris, she explores the carnivalesque aspects of the phenomenon. Even though *carnival* indeed involved ridiculing the official realms of Church and State, it goes beyond that. However, I believe that Davis’ observations on laughter and carnival are valuable to understand charivaris—and, in the future, online shamings. So, I will open a brief parenthesis to address this matter.

ii - A Parenthesis: How Charivaris Mockingly Reinforced and Challenged Order

Bakhtin (1984) understood carnival as a second life for Middle Ages and Renaissance people. While there were “official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials” (p. 5)—an official life—carnival offered the people a second life, “organized on the basis of laughter” (p. 8). While the official life’s rites and feasts sanctioned the prevailing order, the unofficial life of carnival was the suspension of this order and its truth, the norms of etiquette, rank, and decency. During official feasts, inequality was reinforced, with everyone

expected to show up in full regalia and demonstrating rank. However, during carnival, people experienced becoming equal in their “purely human relations” (p. 10), creating new forms of communication, free of the rules of decency and etiquette. Carnival meant “change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities” (p. 11). Carnival, then, had a serious oppositional and resistance potential in Bakhtin (Humphrey, 2000), since it “...provided an alternative construction of social relations” (B. Taylor, 1995).

Bakhtin’s concept has proven to be highly fruitful, being used by several authors interested in the powerful image of inversion of hierarchies by the crowd, being the “ideal critical tool for approaching all kinds of social and material interactions and behaviours, from car-boot sales through to rock and roll” (Humphrey, 2000). Foucault himself (1975) refers to “carnival” while talking about public executions, when the people would refuse to condemn the convicted, making them a celebrated hero—a carnival that could be quickly transformed into a revolt: “Pour le peuple qui est là et regarde, il y a toujours, même dans la plus extrême vengeance du souverain, prétexte à une revanche” (p. 64)⁹.

Humphrey (2000), however, criticizes the overuse of the carnival concept, stating that there is often an inversion of reality and transgression without necessarily an opposition to the reigning powers. He prefers the term “misrule” to those practices of inversion that do not contain opposition. Notwithstanding that claim, Davis (1971) does exactly what Humphrey argues against: she understands that charivaris are an inversion of reality in the Bakhtinian sense at the same time that they *reaffirm the existing social order*.

⁹ Contrary to the idea of a carnivalesque procession during executions, Merback states that “Late medieval processions were surely not quite as solemn and orderly as their eighteenth-century counterparts ..., but neither were they as carnivalesque as some writers have supposed. Allowing for variations from country to country, processions were for the most part carefully orchestrated, symbolically rich rites of passage in which the community played a crucial mediating role between authorities, the executioner and the condemned” (p. 139).

Investigating the leading role of youth groups (abbeys) in charivaris in sixteenth century France, Davis uses Bakhtin to understand charivaris as a source of destruction and renewal. Charivaris were a "...carnival treatment of reality, with an important function in the village" (p. 53). Charivaris appropriated and inverted the language of kingdoms and religious abbeys, giving to youth groups a rule over others in the community, "and it gave enormous scope to mockery and derision" (p. 54). This mockery, however, was in service of the village. For example, in the case of second marriages, charivaris intended to placate the dead spouse ("...sometimes present at the charivari as an effigy", p. 53); look after, from the economic and psychological points of view, the children of the first marriage; and to punish the re-married widow for taking someone out of the pool of young eligible bachelors: "It was very much in the service of the village community, clarifying the responsibilities that the youth would have when they were married men and fathers, helping to maintain proper order within marriage, and to sustain the biological continuity of the village" (p. 54). In the cities, the action of the youth abbeys assumed more functions, and sometimes they could turn against political authorities. Notwithstanding that, "These elements of political and social criticism in the midst of carnival were intended to destroy-and-renew political life in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, but not to lead directly to further political action" (pp. 68-69). Taking into consideration these various forms of charivari, Davis concludes that "...the structure of the carnival form can evolve so that it can act both to reinforce order and suggest alternatives to the existing order".

It is hard to know if Davis overturns Bakhtin's proposition about inversion, transgression and opposition by stating that the carnival misrule could be used to reinforce communal norms. It is also essential to notice that it is even doubtful that the carnival was actually such a revolutionary instrument. Umberto Eco (2011) states that Bakhtin's assumption that carnival

lowers kings and crowns the crowd is false. To Eco, “Carnival... requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognized and respected... Carnival can exist only as an authorized transgression” (p. 6). As in comedy, carnival needs the existence of rules so they can be mimicked and mocked; they are not, however, seriously challenged but presupposed. It is an example “...of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule” (p. 6). Moreover, Taylor (1995) reminds that part of the critiques against Bakhtin’s carnival is its excessively optimistic view of the people. Indeed, as aforementioned, carnival supposedly has an equalizing quality, in which everybody meets in their human condition; laughter, in this sense, is directed at everyone, including the one who laughs (Bakhtin, 1984). Nevertheless, Bakhtin does not address the aspect of derision when it is directed to less powerful people in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, such as Jews (B. Taylor, 1995). Considering this omission, it is hard to see laughter as equalizing and universal as Bakhtin supposed.

It is not my intention to decide who was right between Eco (2011) and Bakhtin (1984) or if Davis (1971) is undoing Bakhtin’s theory. However, Davis’ exquisite historical work on the sixteenth-century French abbeys shows that misrule, mockery, ritual and institutional inversion could be used to oppose the constituted powers and reinforce social norms. It makes no difference whether or not to call these practices carnival. What is important is to recognize the festive aspect of charivaris that went along with their violent turn and their imposition of social norms at the same time that they mocked official institutions.

Do online shamings reinforce groups’ norms or challenge the established order, and what is the role of mockery in this phenomenon? Marwick (2023) points out that “Morally motivated networked harassment reinforces the community’s shared standards and signals that the people participating in the harassment share common values” (p. 121). Clark (2020), on the other hand,

understands that cancellations “should be read as a last-ditch appeal for justice” (p. 89) by marginalized counterpublics against people in positions of power. As I have proposed in Chapter 3, about moral crusades, I understand that the public involved in online public shamings are imagined communities who share values and principles and see these values and principles as threatened by opposing imagined communities. In this way those imagined communities think that Sacco and Cooper belong to a community of racists, Richards is a feminazi, and Stone is part of a generation who does not respect the war dead. All these communities understand that they are fighting injustice by some other group who are possibly dominant or are trying to dominate society. And, by standing by their values, the communities reaffirm their community bonds and common values. In this way, online shamers perceive themselves to be fighting a great injustice, an opposing power, at the same time that they are reaffirming their community’s values.

And humour, derision and mockery have a big part in it. In Richard’s case, for example, an attacker uses the meme “Number 7 Student Watches Porn” to make fun of the fact she was fired. Another user humorously publishes Amy Cooper’s professional address inciting others to pressure her employer, followed by emojis (user C6). In Stone’s case, a Twitter user excuses themselves because they have to go to the restroom “to do a Lindsey Stone” (user L9). To oppose Rowling’s assumption relating biology and womanhood, users made puns (user R17) and references to Harry Potter’s most famous lines (user R10). In the case of Sacco, as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7, humour is not only a main type of discourse in the online shaming (more than half of the messages are, in some way, humorous) but it also constitutes an end in itself. As in charivaris, then, humour, hostile derision, is used to both affirm the group’s rules and challenge opposing values, at the same time that it functions as a party and amusement for the participants.

3.4. Ways of Punishment Through Charivari: Violence and Shame

As I showed in the previous pages, charivaris were a public form of punishment exercised by the community through a ritualistic vocabulary to establish or reinstate what was tolerable or not. It is worth now taking a closer look at a fourth characteristic, which is what precisely the punishment imposed in charivaris was. I will highlight two main sides of the charivari punishment: violence and shame.

i - Violence

First, the violence. It is not uncommon to read accounts of charivaris that are violently executed and in which the victim ends up hurt, maimed or dead. Even though charivaris were marked by mocking laughter, this could easily slip into “hostile derision” (Ingram, 1984, p. 82). The tradition of “riding the stang”, for example, which meant being mockingly paraded around town riding a pole, could be violently enforced. According to Nash and Kilday (2010),

A ‘stang’ was a long, unshaven wooden pole, usually a tree trunk or a similar equivalent. ...the individual targeted had their hands tied behind their back, and they were then straddled over the ‘stang’ and their legs were tied together below the knees. The ‘stang’ was then lifted up and marched around the neighbourhood. At various stations during the riding, the pole was lifted high into the air and then swiftly lowered causing the victim to cry out in pain each time he or she was bounced off the ‘stang’. As the tree trunk used was highly abrasive and often still had branches sticking out of it, the individual’s thighs, legs and genital area were regularly ‘fearfully torn and scratched’, and by the end of the riding it has been recorded that some individuals were rendered unconscious due to the suffering they had endured (p. 38).

Likewise, when the charivariers used the dunking stool, they tied the victim to a chair and “...then dunked it several times in the local river or cess-pool” (Nash & Kilday, 2010, p. 35). In Canada and in the United States, charivaris could end up in disorder, with people maimed or killed, as explains Palmer (1978). The author quotes a news article from the *Globe* in 1881 which discusses the death of a man in Ottawa during a charivari. The *Globe* says, ““In many previous cases participants in the charivari have lost their lives or innocent persons have been laid low by misdirected blows, but in this case the bridegroom was the victim”” (p. 27). In New Orleans,

charivaris became less accepted by the public when they became more violent, with, for example, the crowd targeting a bride's house "...with showers of bricks and other missiles" (McKningt, 2005, p. 419). Likewise, Kent (1983) narrates how the public roughly treated the Cripples in Burton-upon-Trent. Also, in Russia, as said, women were stripped naked and paraded around town; more severe cases (usually involving someone who refused to obey the community) could end up in violence, as said by Frank (1987). That was the case of an Anna Akulicheva, who was first paraded around town, and, after calling the official authorities against the charivariers, was whipped in public by her husband, as determined by the village's elders.

Furthermore, charivaris could attract violence after the ritual was over. Alford (1959) narrates an occasion in which, in the 1950s, a folklorist friend remembered the last time a charivari had happened in his region: "Last night. One killed and two wounded" (p. 513). In the case, which happened in France, a married couple was the target of the charivari. When the festivities were done, and the crowd was heading home, a shot was fired in the dark, killing a young man and injuring two. The suspect in the shooting was a man who had been charivariated not long before but who delayed revenge. A few days later, the man was found hanging from a tree. Death could also follow a charivari in the form of suicide (Thompson, 1993).

However, despite these pieces of evidence of violence, Thompson (1993) argues that charivaris controlled the crowd's hostility. The author reminds us that, in many instances, the culprit was substituted by an effigy or a next-door neighbour. By acting in a symbolic form, rough music displaced violence: the ritual not only regulated conflicts in the community but also regulated how discipline and constraint could be established.

Violence is also present in online shamings—in this thesis's examples, violence shows up in the form of threats and also symbolically, disguised in humour and imagery. I have addressed

the threats when describing the five cases in Chapter 2. There, I have described how, for example, Cooper received messages demanding that she commit suicide and wishing her to be raped in prison. People wished Stone to be beaten and die (user L6). Both Cooper and Richards had to leave their homes because of threats.

Violence, therefore, has a prominent place in online public shamings, with the shamed being the target of multiple threatening messages. It is important to notice that this research probably does not have access to the most violent messages, which are likely sent to the shamed person instead of publicly posted on platforms like Twitter, which regulate and take down speech that incites violence. Nonetheless, in Chapter 7 I will show how, even under that control, users manage to spread violent messages, disguised by imagery and humour. At that point, it will be clear how, as in charivaris, online shamings not only use violence but also make it a form of amusement.

ii - Shame

If the violence was not omnipresent in charivaris, the public shaming of the culprit certainly was. Mocking, ridicule, shame and humiliation are constantly referred to as part of the charivari ritual. For Greenhill (2010), charivaris worked as punishment through humiliation and financial extraction. Nash and Kilday (2010) refer to shame as a tool used both by official authorities and the populace to control personal conduct. Favretto (2015) states that, even though Italian workers resorted to mild forms of violence, they also punished strike-breakers and *capi* with shaming and humiliation. Thompson (1993) says that “ridicule, shame, intimidation” (p. 9) were characteristic of the eighteenth-century plebeian culture, and he defines rough music as a “rude cacophony” that directed “mockery or hostility against individuals” (p. 467). Macedo (2005) also defines charivaris as a “mocking parade” (“*desfile jocoso*”—p. 1). Dobash and

Dobash (1981) state that the crowd shamed and humiliated transgressors, who were the target of public ridicule. Charivaris, says Ingram (1984), as mentioned above, were directly connected to official shaming punishments, such as carting criminals "...with basins rigging before them...", being "...paraded on a horse or ass with their face to the tail...", and being defiled or ducked (p. 92). Greer (1990) explains that, in Canada, "Public shaming was, of course, a central feature of any charivari, inseparable from the noisy charge of desecration" (p. 30). In Russia, villagers would impose non-violent forms of punishment on insiders by inflicting "shame and public disgrace upon the guilty party" (Frank, 1987, p. 241).

Nevertheless, what does it mean to impose shame on someone? Foucault (1975) and Ignatieff (1978) explore the evolution of punishment in Modernity. They recognize how, in Ignatieff's words, "all such ritual punishments depended for their effectiveness as a ceremonial of deterrence on the crowd's tacit support of the authority's sentence" (Ignatieff, 1978, p. 21) but that is as close as they get to examining the role of shame in punishment. What being shamed means, why it matters to the punished person, and what is different about shame as a means of deterrence remains unexplored. Furthermore, this seems to be a general tendency among other authors, too. As Nash and Kilday (2010) state, "In the genre of crime history, where we might expect to find a close and detailed analysis of shame due to its correlations with crime, deviance and the law, the subject received relatively little attention" (p. 9). Among historians, although it is common to enumerate the shaming practices and to talk about the ostracization that followed, there is not much investigation into the aforementioned aspects of shame.

What does being shamed mean, then?

Kollareth et al. (2019) explain that *shame* is a folk term that encompasses a variety of real events and that the word has meant different things in different periods or even within the same

time. My intention here, therefore, is not to search for a definitive and all-inclusive concept of shame. On the contrary, I will try to find a definition corresponding to shame being used as punishment by the public against an individual¹⁰.

For the purposes here, shame comes from the failure to reach an ideal state or goals (Morrison, 1983; Piers, 1971). That is, shame relates to those ideal states one aims to achieve; shame happens when there is a shortcoming, a failure in achieving them (Piers, 1971). It is important to notice that, in this failure, shame involves the *whole* self, what a person *is* (H. B. Lewis, 1971): “With shame ... one’s very identity is supposedly at fault” (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021, p. 9). As summarized by Nussbaum (2004), shame is a “painful emotion responding to a sense of failure to attain some ideal state. Shame, as is generally agreed by those who analyse it, pertains to the whole self, rather than to a specific act of the self” (p. 184).

Moreover, for Lewis (1971), shame works as a theatre played internally to the eyes of the other, present in reality or just in ideation. That is, shame is experienced as coming from outside, from an unfavourable evaluation from the other. Shame arises when one sees oneself from the point of view of others (Scheff, 1997). Therefore, it makes sense that the fear brought by shame is that of abandonment, expulsion, ostracism, and contempt—the “death by emotional starvation” (Piers, 1971, p. 29). That is why it also makes sense when Scheff (1997, 2000) says that shame involves “...the feeling of a threat to the social bond” (2000, p. 97). The social correlate of shame is disgrace, and shame is “...the emotional correlate of a threatened bond” (1997, p. 206).

¹⁰ In this way, I adopt the same position as Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021): “For our purposes, it is not the emotion but a related practice of shaming that matters. The presence of shame as an emotion is neither necessary nor sufficient for an activity to count as shaming. What matters, for our argument, is the manner in which some agents characterise a certain element of moral character as shameful, meaning that agents who have this trait are not worthy of the self-respect necessary to take part in public discourse. Whilst shame as a feeling may ensue from such actions, it is the characterisation of a person as shameful, unworthy of public participation, and beyond the pale, that is the core of this practice. Whatever her emotions, publicly shamed individuals suffer a loss of control over their public identity due to others’ perception of their character as fundamentally defective, rather than opprobrium being directed at their actions, which are within their control” (pp. 9-10).

In this way, it is possible to understand Braithwaite's (1989) observation that shame deters people from behaving in a way that would mean loss of social approval.

Public shaming punishment, then, "... is a communicative social practice in which people are framed publicly as being *outside* of the community of *morally acceptable* persons, however they feel about it" (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021, p. 10 - my emphasis). Imposing shame, in this way, has a double aspect: (1) showing that the person is flawed and, because of that, (2) cutting their social bond, that is, setting the person outside of the community. In this way, shame can be seen in three aspects of the charivaris: their exposition of flaws, their common practices and their ways of resolution.

Firstly, the exposition of the culprit's flaws to the eyes of others. As Thompson (1993) explained, charivaris brought to light what was once hidden, even if the community knew it before. The culprit's sins and flaws, usually ignored or left alone by the community, became suddenly relevant and too big to be let go:

Perhaps we are sheltered from each other more by artifice than we realise. Two parties to a social pretence, even when each knows perfectly well that the other is pretending, are nonetheless enabled by that artifice to co-exist. Even hypocrisy is a kind of mist which blurs the hard radiance of mutual hostility. But rough music is a public naming of what has been named before only in private (pp. 487-488).

Charivaris, then, exposed to all the flaws and inadequacies of the culprit. The exposition breaks the culprit's projection of the artifice of a social pretence, and all their imperfections are now naked to the eyes of others. Charivaris were the "destroyers of privacy", that "demonstrated a contrast between the hidden and the manifest" (Ingram, 1984, p. 99). Shame is perceiving a failure in attaining a certain ideal state. In charivaris, the fear of having one's shortcomings seen by the eyes of others becomes real. Certainly, I am not saying here what the charivaried person *felt*, only what the crowd tried to impose. Indeed, there were cases in which the culprit did not seem ripped apart by regret and shame. For example, people put in the dunking stool would

sometimes give a speech about the injustice of their situation between dips (Nash & Kilday, 2010). People would also complain to the local authorities (Frank, 1987; Greenhill, 2010) or attack the crowd (Greenhill, 2010). This all shows that charivaris were a ritual that tried to impose shame but did not necessarily succeed in it.

Secondly, the charivaris as practices were a "...mocking parade to execrate individuals"(Macedo, 2005), in which people were ridiculed in a variety of ways, including the donkey ride, smearing, cursing, parading around town, stripping naked the culprit, tarring and feathering, dunking, or hanging the stolen objects on the culprit's neck, as has been discussed above. These practices target the individual, ridiculing them. The person is lowered and loathed by the public. Thus, the focus is less on the act ("You have done *this*") than on the person who committed the act ("*You* have done this").

Thirdly, is the resolution of the charivari. One possibility for the culprit at the end of a charivari is to be reintegrated into the community by repentance and, after promising to mend their ways, accepting the previously broken social norms (Kent, 1983). That seemed to be, for example, the tradition of the French Canadian charivari, which was aimed at submitting the charivaried to the community's authority "in order the gain readmittance to the fold", as explained by Greer (1990, p. 32). This reintegration could happen after the offer of a sum of money to the crowd. A similar outcome was found in Russia, which had a "...ritualized, though temporary, expulsion of an offender from the community", who could be reintegrated through the payment of vodka (Frank, 1987, p. 249). Similar customs were also observed in the United States (McKningt, 2005), England (Kent, 1983), France (N. Z. Davis, 1971), and Italy (Favretto, 2015). Charivaris did not always end with the reestablishment of the social bond, though. Sometimes "the victim was made into an outcast", as said by Thompson (1993, p. 480), with a

permanent expulsion from the group. Nash and Kilday (2010) state that “More often than not, the intention of the English skimmington rides was not only to shame the individuals involved and to publicise the scandalous nature of their present situation, but it was also a blatant attempt to have the culprits removed or exorcised from the community on a permanent basis” (p. 37). That could happen even in those locations where the charivari usually ended with the reintegration of the culprit. In the French Canadian charivari, if the person seriously resisted the celebration, “ugly scenes could ensue” (Greer, 1990, p. 32). In Russia, “...expulsion could be made permanent if someone repeated a crime or perpetrated a more serious infraction” (Frank, 1987, p. 249). In cases like these, charivaris made real the threat of shame of breaking the social bond.

The symbolism of the break of the social bond by the charivari is very well demonstrated by some of the rough music practices in England. There, effigies of the culprits were paraded and often, by the end, burned or hanged, writes Thompson (1993). Sometimes the community would even stage a mock burial. To Thompson, this made the culprit, even though alive, already dead for the community, in a form of ultimate excommunication. Charivaris that ended in expulsion, then, were a shame-oriented ritual, by which the crowd tries to materialize the fear of the shamed person: expulsion, ostracism, excommunication.

In online public shamings, the name-calling, vexing, and shaming are clear. Users call the culprits stupid (user L10), bitch (users L11, L14, R10, A3), feces (user L9), swine feces (user L12), hipster (user L13), dumb (users L14, A5), bastard (user R11), radical feminist (user A4), idiot (user A6), phoney (user A7), or Karen (Cooper, 2020). Users make sure to attack the *person* as someone low—the cursing at the shamed by referring to excrement is particularly telling in this aspect. It is a parade of mockery and insults against the individual, who has been revealed as someone vile, who cannot live up to the community’s standards. Their ultimate flaw has been

revealed to all, to the public, allowing now for hostility to take place. The end goal of this process is to make the individual disappear from the community's life, losing their job and their house—they are not good enough even to keep their dog. Shamed people are not trustworthy for positions of responsibility, for representing anything, or for living among us. Disappear from our sight—that is what user A8 tells Richards.

4. The Decline of Charivaris

Now that I went through the charivari and its characteristics, it is time to understand its end. By the nineteenth century, charivaris were already rare (Dobash & Dobash, 1981; McKnight, 2005; Palmer, 1978; Thompson, 1993). Understanding charivaris and their relation to online shamings is also understanding their decline and their substitution by other shaming and claims-making practices that are present to this day. The history of their demise involves several changes brought by Modernity that affected (1) the regulation of social control, (2) shame, and, (3) popular contention.

Firstly, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the violence of charivari started to be regarded by the bourgeoisie as a "...threat to order and stability", which "...repelled any bourgeois support it once attracted" (Palmer, 1978, p. 54). More than that, however, the charivaris were a form of social regulation outside the State, and, by the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, efforts were made to institutionalize and regulate social life via official forms—this meant "...to suppress alternative forms of authority and community expressions of displeasure" (Dobash & Dobash, 1981, p. 570). According to Macedo (2005), during the Middle Ages, customary and communitarian practices of justice were tolerated, but that was over by the end of that period when there was an "affirmation and consolidation of law as a public and official expression of justice" (p. 9).

Moreover, the dismissal of charivaris also reflected the changes in the social uses of shame. It must be said that there is no continuous decline or rise of shame during Modernity—shame did not disappear or become more prevalent (Braithwaite, 1993). Indeed, Nash and Kilday (2010) explain that, with Modernity, shame started to be seen as “anachronist, punitive and pre-modern”, as was being substituted with incarceration. However, this did not mean that shame stopped regulating social life—it only did so differently: modernity recast shame in bourgeois forms, in “modernised urbanised shame performances”. One of the ways shame continued being a tool of social regulation was in mass media. In Victorian Era Great Britain, newspapers scrutinized members of the monarchy and aristocracy and publicized their scandals. Mass media allowed a widening reach for shame and for that behaviour (of the upper elites) to be judged by a large public (the middle class). In this process, the middle class could define “what it found distasteful, abhorrent and shameful” (p. 158), establishing boundaries of behaviours and creating itself as a group different from other groups: “Critiques of monarchy and aristocracy did persuade individuals to think through their psychological standards of propriety and to judge these against the reputation of people they had never met” (p. 170). The enlargement of the public sphere and the creation of mass media started the “modern science of media trial by journalism” (p. 170). That meant that shame was now “...even more accessible than ever”, being “potentially global rather than restricted to errant individuals within disparate communities” (p. 156).

Finally, the end of charivaris—or at least of *rough music* in Great Britain—also meant a change in the repertoires of popular contention, according to Tilly (2016). The author investigates why, between 1758 and 1834, popular contention in Great Britain changed from localized, direct acts like collective seizures of grain and rough music to “...meetings,

demonstrations, petition drives, public statements and association building”, with proliferating “...connections among local, regional and national politics...” (p. XX). These changes were caused by numerous factors in Great Britain’s history, such as the proletarianization of the workforce, the concentration of capital, urbanization, immigration, and an increase in the size of the State and because of the very learning of new modes of action that were able to respond to this new scenario.

Thus, for Tilly (2016), the repertoires of contention—that is, “the established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each others’ interests” (p. 43)—changed during that period in way that: (1) they stopped being “concentrated in a single community” (p. 45) and began to refer to “interests and issues that spanned many localities” (p. 46); (2) lost a significant variation of routines that were tied to groups, places and issues (e.g., the multiple ways to charivari a person that varied in time and place), and changed into having routines that were less varied but were transferable across issues (like the demonstration, used by multiple different publics for multiple different issues); and, (3) issues started being directly addressed by people in appeals to national centers of power. Before, local issues were directly addressed by the people, such as in rough music, when the crowd directly attacked the wrongdoer in their home; notwithstanding that, issues that involved large-scale interests were addressed by appealing to a local patron. That also meant that the people left behind and repertoires for direct action that were effective in the short-term as well as “indirect and cumulative action” (p. 352). Whereas in rough music, the crowd would go directly to the responsible person and guarantee immediate solution—either reparation or expulsion—new forms of popular contention counted on the cumulative and indirect pressure of marches, petitions and gatherings.

In sum, charivaris ended due to several processes involved in the modernization of society. Communal justice was no longer possible when the State monopolized rule creation and enforcement. Shaming practices, though regarded as archaic, gained new forms. And, people learned and needed new ways to express their discontent and to make claims.

5. Conclusion

Charivaris, therefore, were a symbolic vocabulary of rites used to enforce community values of varied nature. They were a horizontal imposition of these norms, brought by the community against the culprit; because of that, the occurrence of a charivari depended on the community's power relations and the context of the wrongdoing. Moreover, this horizontality also led to complex relationships with state and church authorities. Charivaris were public in the sense that they exposed to the crowd what was once private, publicizing disgrace, opening the way to shaming, and serving as an example to the community. Finally, charivaris worked through the imposition of violence and shame to punish the culprit.

I have also presented, briefly, how online shamings fare in relation to charivaris. Some clues have been found: online shamings also are imposed horizontally, but have complex relationships with the State and other institutions; they serve multiple social uses, with varying ideological pedigree; and, they use humour and derision to challenge other online imagined communities at the same time that they reinforce the values of the shamers' own imagined community. Also in common with charivaris, online shamings work through exposing to the public the wrongdoing, publicizing disgrace and inviting shaming, violence and expulsion. Unlike charivaris, however, online shamings dismiss the local context to impose a punishment: very little is known about each of the shamed people, who are fully defined by a single moment in time.

At this point, it is possible to start to conceptualize online public shamings as a full movement of deviance construction, in which there is both the interest of a group in extending rules and values beyond a community, and the intention to impose sanctions upon someone for a wrongdoing, all this using a very peculiar vocabulary or repertoire of contention. Online public shamings, in this way, would represent battles over values and principles among online imagined communities and the will to punish a specific person, using as a weapon a form of online congregation in which social media users amuse themselves and shame a wrongdoer, who is made an example for society.

It is clear, then, that charivaris are a phenomena with promising points of comparison in relation to online shamings. The analysis done so far, however, was only superficial, based on the little information I have about each of the five cases. To better investigate online shamings, and their possible similar contours to moral crusades and charivaris, I must now engage with a larger and deeper empirical material. I will do so by investigating further the case of Justine Sacco. My methods are explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: Methods

In this methodology chapter, firstly I will narrate the entire research path and its choices in general strokes, allowing the reader to comprehend the larger methodological decisions taken. Secondly, I will detail some of the more intricate aspects of the methods and how I arrived at specific conclusions.

1. The research path

1.1. Defining the phenomenon

This research started in 2016, after I read Jon Ronson's (2016) *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*. Ronson brought an interesting journalistic account of public shamings and his work kindled in me the interest in an investigation of the phenomenon, but from an academic point of view.

Therefore, when my interest in this topic began, I had in mind a specific kind of social process, as narrated by Ronson. But, I could only give examples of it and not provide a precise definition. I knew, nonetheless, that I was interested in mass online reactions against an individual because of some wrongdoing. Unfortunately, the literature on the theme at that time was even scarcer than today, so I could not rely on previous academic research to delimit my subject. To complicate things further, my ideas about what to study were still diffuse and amorphous. By the time I entered the uOttawa PhD program in 2019, the phenomenon that resembled what had been described by Ronson was being labelled with the broad, popular, and all-encompassing name of "cancel culture." Any kind of critique or censorship was deemed a cancellation.

In this way, the phenomena's popular nomenclature was so broad that it meant almost nothing since anything could fit inside it; on the other hand, I had only general strokes of what

the phenomenon was and its characteristics. First, it was necessary to frame what the subject of this thesis was, putting together its basic characteristics and processes. Second, it was necessary to name this phenomenon, to separate it from the confusing and indistinct label of “cancel culture”.

It was necessary, then, at the start, to observe the phenomenon’s characteristics and differences, establishing its basic outline. To do so, I initiated a collection of cancellation cases with a wide range of themes, geographical locations, dates, and people involved. The collection criteria at the very beginning were flexible and mostly intuitive. I accepted suggestions from colleagues, cases seen in documentaries or reported in newspapers. The ideas that informed this collection were basically related to the horizontality of the process (community-based punishment), the use of shame as punishment, and the use of information and communication technology, as well as a light-handed delineation of someone being attacked for doing something perceived as wrong. I have tried not to judge or discard cases if they loosely fit these intuitive notions; I have also considered whether other people labelled them as “cancel culture”. This process resulted in a selection of sixteen cases, including high-profile examples like Gamergate and Justine Sacco; Brazilian examples like the postsecondary admission quotas defrauders and influencer Mariana Ferrer; liminal cases, such as Monica Lewinsky’s and the hate speech against Taylor Dumpson (the Black woman who neo-Nazis harassed after she became a student body president). These cases were tabulated and compared in terms of their characteristics, including the phases of the process, information about the targeted person and the perceived wrongdoing, how the act became public, the public’s reaction, the consequences imposed, and the reaction of the shamed.

Through this analysis and comparison, I began to understand and classify the phenomenon's basic features, such as its typical development, as described in Chapter 2. The comparison of these sixteen cases allowed me to pinpoint the aspects of the cancellation that deserved better investigation or that could be determinant in defining a more specific phenomenon, that is, online public shamings. These cases led to interesting questions, such as "Is hate speech part of the phenomenon?" "Is social media necessary for it?" "Are consequences to the shamed person a defining factor?" The comparison allowed me to see what was typical and atypical, separating cases according to their closeness to what I was trying to describe or not.

However, to fully define the phenomenon and its main features, a reduction was necessary, as working with the characteristics of sixteen cases could potentially lead to more doubt instead of any conclusions. To move the definition forward, I decided to reduce the number of cases and engage in a deeper analysis of cases that typically represented the subject under study, but that had contrasting characteristics among themselves. In this way, the comparison of the sixteen cases helped delineate the phenomenon and select the cases in a double movement: to exclude cases that were not part of subject under study and to select cases that were the best examples of it.

Indeed, through the comparison, I was initially able to identify what was *not* part of the phenomenon. This first step allowed me to exclude a few cases, such as Taylor Dumpson's—it lacked specific wrongdoing, being better characterized as hate speech. Likewise, Lewinsky's case was excluded because the presence of mass self-communication was incipient at best, corresponding more to a political scandal broadcasted via mass media. Excluding these few cases helped circumscribe the phenomenon, for example, it became clear that some sort of perceived wrongdoing was necessary, and that the main vehicle for punishing the culprit was mass self-

communication. Comparing the cases that were and were not inside the phenomenon was important, then, to initially delineate the object.

In a second movement, I chose typical but diverse cases among the group that was left, keeping in mind how the comparison highlighted typical and atypical features. I also considered other factors, such as the cases' complexity and available information. Therefore, I set aside Gamergate, a series of online public shamings that happened between 2014 and 2015, due to its complexity. I also discarded the Brazilian case of postsecondary admissions quotas defrauders because of the lack of information about it (a series of lawsuits forced the Twitter users responsible for the shaming to set their accounts private, hiding the posts about it).

Among the remaining cases, I selected five that, though typical, had contrasting features. After I pre-selected five cases, I submitted them to 46 different criteria to make sure they were diverse. These criteria were:

(1) *About the shamed individual*: (i) What are the personal characteristics (gender, race, wealth, media presence etc); (ii) Is the shamed a group or individual? (iii) What were the power relationships in the network (did it allow resistance, counter-reaction, etc.); (iv) Is the shamed a public or private individual? (v) Is the shamed an institutional actor?

(2) *About the wrongdoing*: (vi) Did the fact happen "IRL" (in real life), online or both? (vii) Did the fact really happen? Or was it falsely accused or misinterpreted? (viii) Where did it happen? (ix) When did it happen? (x) What was the fact? An opinion? An everyday life event? A joke? (xi) Is there controversy over the fact's morality? i.e., is it generally frowned upon, or is there discussion over whether it is morally acceptable or not? (xii) Did the fact lead to a *direct* confrontation of the shamed with someone (e.g., Amy Cooper vs. Christian Cooper in Central Park), or did the fact lead to a confrontation of the

shamed's perceived values with the shamers' morals (an *indirect* confrontation, where there is no specific offended person)? (xiii) Was the confrontation foreseeable?

(3) *About the publicization of the fact and the reaction to it:* (xiv) Can the fact go viral (i.e., gain a massive audience) or not (a viral event)? And, how to account for that?; (xv) Who made the fact public? (xvi) Was it an institutional agent (e.g., the *New York Times*, an activist group) or an individual agent (e.g., Christian Cooper) who made it public? (xvii) What was the publisher's interest in the fact? (xviii) What is the relationship of the publisher with the shamed person? (xix) How did the fact become viral (the viral event)? (xx) How long after the fact did it become public? (xxi) Were there any institutions (public or private) involved with the fact?

(4) *About the outrage:* (xxii) Who initially perceived the fact as being wrong? (xxiii) What is perceived as wrong? (xxiv) Is there a prevalent worldview among the shamers? (xxv) Is this worldview prevalent in society or still debated? (xxvi) What is this worldview? (xxvii) What norms are involved (legal, moral, administrative, social, professional, etc.) (xxviii) What is the specific content of the reaction (slurs, demands, threats etc)? (xxix) Was there humour in the reactions (use of memes, jokes, etc.)? (xxx) Were there attacks against the shamed's defenders? (xxxi) Were there attacks/investigations of the shamed's past?

(5) *About the use of mass self-communication:* (xxxii) What platform was used for the reaction (Twitter, Facebook, 4chan, Instagram etc). (xxxiii) Was there some level of organization in the reaction? (xxxiv) What medium was used for this organization?

(6) *About the context, the consequences and the reactions:* (xxxv) What is the context? (xxxvi) The context can have a stronger effect (e.g., George Floyd's death on the same

day as the Central Park incident) or weaker effect on the shaming. (xxxvii) Might the shaming lead to consequences for the shamed or not? (xxxviii) What was the type of consequences: positive or negative? (xxxix) What was the type of consequences: demands to be fired, doxxing, threats, etc.? (xl) What was the type of consequences: legal, social, professional, psychological, etc.? (xli) Did third parties suffer any consequences? (xlii) Did third parties participate in imposing the consequences? (xliii) Was institutional change among the consequences? (xliv) How long did the consequences for the shamed last? (xlv) Did the case generate other shamings? (xlvi) How does the shamed person react to their shaming: apologizing, doubling down, disappearing, using legal action, deleting previous posts, activism, denial of the fact or its interpretation, etc.?

Through this process, I sampled the cases while trying to find, at the same time, typicality and diversity: cases that represent the subject at hand but that also express variety within the phenomenon.

Five cases were selected: two anti-racism cases (Sacco and Cooper), one anti-transphobia case (Rowling), one defending the memory of war dead (Stone), and one involving anti-sexism, misogyny, privacy, and racism (Richards). They also varied in relation to, among other factors, where the wrongdoing occurred, whether in the embodied “IRL” world (Cooper, Richards, Stone) or exclusively virtually (Sacco and Rowling); whether it was a joke (Sacco, Richards, Stone, Rowling) or not (Cooper); how the shamed reacted (negation or apology); what the consequences were for each of them; and, what was the media presence and economic situation of the shamed at the time of the online public shaming.

It is important to say that the work of systematizing, tabulating, comparing, excluding and searching for typicality and diversity was already extremely important to start delineating the

phenomenon. By excluding a few cases from the phenomenon I was able to establish essential characteristics; by tabulating and comparing I was able to construct an initial frame for the modus operandi and development of the cases; by searching for diversity, I identified points that deserved better investigation and I was able to consolidate which cases should be analysed in depth.

By examining and comparing each of these five cases, I was able to structure the basic features and processes of the phenomenon, defining it, as seen in Chapter 2. Initially, I considered the characteristics of 16 cases to guide the comparison. However, in this closer analysis, I attempted to describe the cases in terms of their procedures and development, also paying attention to the social media users' manifestations about them. In this phase, I collected documentary data about the cases, mainly news articles, online messages such as tweets, online groups' discussions, and online petitions. In sum, these were materials that could be found by online search engines such as Google, but also those that could be found thanks to links and references in the initial documents. The data collection, at this point, started by online searches but continued by following the trail of online information via hyperlinks and textual references, snowballing the information.

At this point, to collect data for the five cases, I have relied on the principles of *diversification* and *saturation*, as elaborated by Pires (2007). That is, I have sought to obtain as much information as possible about the cases, fully depicting their various aspects (diversification). This search was limited once additional sources no longer yielded new or relevant information (saturation).

A final observation on this first phase of the data collection: it is important to notice that not only the social media posts but also the journalistic accounts constitute *primary sources*. As I

have indicated in Chapter 2, and as will become clearer in the analysis sections, traditional media *actively* participate in the shaming process, and the shaming process involves not only social media messages but the whole mediatic discourse that is constructed around the cases. *News items are, therefore, part of the shaming.* Moreover, in the current media scenario, the distinction between media vehicles and audiences is not so clear anymore. Many times during the research, I had difficulty understanding if a certain Twitter profile was a professional media enterprise or an amateur one, or simply a parody profile. Furthermore, there are important actors in the media industry, such as actress Kerry Washington, who are also not traditional media but are somehow in the media industry and who have an important weight in the shaming phenomenon. This is all to say that now it is harder to clearly differentiate these actors. Therefore, a dichotomy of *primary* and *secondary* sources in these cases is of little value and potentially misleading.

Through this comparative analysis, I was able to trace the phenomenon's basic features and development, giving it a definition that could be used in this work.

1.2. Digging Deeper: Selection and Collection of the Empirical Data

The collected material, nonetheless, was not sufficient for a deeper analysis of the cases. That is because access to users' online manifestations is limited by social media platforms. Twitter, for example, makes available just a small number of tweets via its free search engine. Furthermore, the tweets found in this type of search are determined by the platform's algorithm, and there is no clear factor, such as chronology, location, or popularity, which explains why the Twitter search gives back certain results and not others. Even though there is an abundance of traditional media sources about these cases, the research question demanded information closer to the users' identities, practices and intentions. Since an online public shaming happens through mass self-communication, unfiltered access to this communication would be invaluable. A larger

dataset, containing messages selected after a thought-through, purposeful search query, would allow me to surpass the shallow definitions and insights and dive into the full processual complexity of online public shamings. To access these unfiltered communications, that is, to access all tweets matching a certain search query, I decided to purchase a tweet collection from the service TrackMyHashtag, which provides historical Twitter data according to a specified search query.

1.3. The Selection of a Single Case

The idea was to purchase one dataset per case. The purchase started with Justine Sacco's, since this is a well-known instance of online public shaming, thoroughly narrated by Jon Ronson (2015a, 2016) and often-cited in the academic literature (see, for example, Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021; Ott, 2017; Tyson, 2022). It is a clear and exemplary case of online public shaming, and, as such, it was the best choice for the first to be analysed.

Furthermore, I also considered that, depending on the quantity and quality of the findings, less cases would be necessary. Having considered that, I proceeded to choose the most relevant case to be the first to analyze, taking into consideration the advice of Pires (2007) about selecting single cases. Indeed, the Pires explains that the selection of a single case can be based on several criteria, including “ la pertinence théorique... ; les caractéristiques et la qualité intrinsèque du cas ; la typicité ou l'exemplarité ; la possibilité d'apprendre avec le cas choisi ; son intérêt social ; son accessibilité à l'enquête ” (p. 46). Sacco's case qualified in all these criteria: firstly, it is one of the most exemplary cases of what online public shaming is and, indeed, it perfectly follows the process delineated in the first chapter. The case is, then, *typical* and *exemplary* of the subject at hand. In this way, it advances the delimitation of the phenomenon, including clarifying its actors, mechanisms and objectives. In relation to its social relevance, besides the considerable

attention it has received, the case was intertwined with important racial disputes in the United States in 2013, as I will show in Chapter 7. Moreover, the case attracted a variety of actors, such as activists, media personalities, NGOs, for-profit organizations, grassroots movements and others, allowing us to understand how and why different actors engage with shamings. Finally, the case had developed mostly via Twitter, whose contents are easily available to researchers.

Besides having good reasons to start with Sacco, there were also good reasons to leave the other cases for a later time. Amy Cooper's case was heavily connected with the Black Lives Matter movement, which would make it difficult to analyze it as an event in itself. J.K. Rowling's case involved a stark difference in financial and media power compared to the other cases, making it an exemplar of shaming billionaire celebrities, but not of shaming individuals who are not public figures, like the majority of the cases here. Richards' case involved online public shaming and counter-online public shaming, making it less exemplary; moreover, the exploratory research indicated that part of the communications in the case took place in other forums, such as 4chan, for which research access is more difficult. The same is true with Lindsay Stone, whose shaming took place mostly on Facebook. Sacco's case, in this way, emerged as the best choice to start.

1.4. Data Collection and its Initial Exploration

Although data can be found in traditional media (which reports online public shamings) or through interviews with the wrongdoers and the whistle-blowers, the truth is that, for the purposes of this thesis, the most relevant source of information is in the communication between social media users. Their messages and manifestations are, at the same time, what constitute the shaming, the flow that reveals the power relationships in place and builds social meanings. In

other words, these messages both constitute the phenomenon itself and are an invaluable source of information in relation to the actors, intentions, practices and strategies.

To select the search query, the first delimitation was to restrict the collection to English-language messages. After that, based on the preliminary documentary research for this case, I pondered several possible search queries, specifically #HasJustineLandedYet, #JustineSacco, @JustineSacco, Justine Sacco, #JustineHasLanded and #SaccoSacked. I also considered several time frames that varied from just two days to two months, starting from her posting the tweet. To have a sense of what each of these possibilities offered, I used the freely available Twitter search engine, observing its results. I concluded that all those search queries, in the period of one month, would give me a good picture of the initial and late reactions to the case. I then asked TrackMyHashtag to quote each of the search terms listed above.

The information by TrackMyHashtag showed that the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet had much more volume than any other of the search queries. For example, the hashtag had approximately 50,000 tweets, while the second most voluminous query (the words “Justine Sacco”) had only 35,000. I therefore decided to go with ordering the #HasJustineLandedYet set. I also chose to order a complete data set—with original tweets, responses, retweets and quotes. My hope was to also analyse the network and how the users interacted with each other.

These choices have important impacts on the dataset bias. Firstly, it must be noticed that the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet reflects an expectation and a joke. The hashtag was invented during the time when users expected Sacco to land and find out about her worldwide infamy. The expression also reflects humour, which attracted people in search of entertainment late on a Friday night. The dataset, then, is marked by this amusing expectation of Sacco’s landing. Moreover, the choice of the hashtag also affects the temporal development of the case. Indeed, it

only makes sense to ask #HasJustineLandedYet if Sacco has not yet landed—which will reflect on the amounts of tweets per day. As I will show, the tweets are highly concentrated on December 21, the day that Twitter users were still waiting for her plane to arrive in South Africa.

Moreover, another dataset bias is that there is a limitation in understanding of the online conversation since, even if an original tweet uses the hashtag, only retweets, replies, and mentions that also use the hashtag were collected. That is, if *A* tweets something using the hashtag, but *B* replies not using the hashtag, only the first message was collected.

Finally, since only messages in the English language were collected, one must assume that whole conversations and trends in other languages, above all from African countries, are absent from the dataset.

Therefore, I requested TrackMyHashTag to create a dataset with all tweets, retweets and replies containing the hashtag #HasJustineLanded yet, from December 20, 2013 to January 20, 2014. The online service delivered a dataset with 51,600 messages, all containing the hashtag for that period of time. The challenge became, then, to deal with this enormous amount of data. Keeping in mind the research question, the data analysis should indicate who is participating in the shaming and how and why. It was necessary, then, to find methods that would allow the analysis (1) to select and identify actors; and, (2) to understand their communicational practices, strategies and intentions. In other words, it was necessary to investigate both actors and content.

2. Social Media Research: Making Big Data Small

The series of modifications brought by ICTs (danah boyd, 2014; Castells, 2008, 2015) to social life also meant new possibilities in social science research. Indeed, ICTs constructed a world where scientists can use big data in quantitative research “...to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets” (danah boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 663). On the other hand,

qualitative research not only adapts analogical methods to the digital media but also uses the new media to question several areas of life (Salmons, 2017) and to develop new techniques to associate small data with big data (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017).

Nonetheless, while designing research method, I kept in mind that, as proposed by Mayr and Weller (2017), the best dataset is the one that best suits the research question. In this aspect, the aim is to understand what, in these online public shamings, is perceived as wrongdoing, exploring them as social processes that involve multiple participants with different perceptions, interests and power relations. It is the challenge, then, to have a picture of the construction of this relationship web, of this social process in its details, nuances, and meanings for the actors involved. The intention is to obtain, therefore, a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of them. In this sense, initially I considered that qualitative research would be the most adequate for this work, since "... qualitative methods are considered more efficient to capture intentions, subjectivities and experiences, as well as historically situated phenomena and their processes" (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017, p. 199). As it will be shown, however, the use of mixed methods offered a good solution to approach a case that could have thousands of data points: a basic quantitative analysis allowed the selection of relevant actors and their corresponding messages, sampling the material to be submitted to qualitative analysis according to its relevance in the network. Indeed, analyzing social media data brings specific challenges, including the *volume* of information to be analyzed (Quan-Haase and Sloan, 2017). As Latzko-Toth et al. (2017) explain, even the analysis of a single tweet and its reactions does not prevent the multitude of *digital traces* from accumulating quickly, that is, "...all user-related data that can be available on social media platforms" (p. 200). Imagine, for example, if the analysis was in relation to J.K. Rowling's tweet on trans women and its reactions: it represents one case, one source of information (Twitter) and

a single post, but there are tens of thousands of digital traces—40,000 retweets, 23,000 comments, 80,000 likes.

The concept of small data refers to a manageable number of digital traces that can be utilized as sources. According to Latzko-Toth et al. (2017), small data refers to the use of small data samples that are manageable by persons using little computational power. In this way, small data is a:

...dataset composed of a relatively small collection of datapoints or cases, so that their analysis can be performed single-handedly via human coding and with little algorithmic assistance, in contrast to big data strategies where computational support is required. (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017, p. 202).

Considering these aspects, a problem emerges of how to deal with Sacco's case, which produced millions of data traces—tweets, views, favourites, retweets, replies, etc.? How to deal with this amount of information and perform a thick description of the case?

Luckily, as explained by Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017), “The use of big versus small data does not have to be an either or debate. Rather, mixed methods can provide an alternative... they can complement each other” (p. 666). One strategy is to combine the two types of data so as to “transform one into the other to meet the research needs of the project” (p. 667).

This dissertation employed a similar strategy: utilizing big data and statistical methods to identify the most important and frequently mentioned users within the network. This discovery was then used to restrict the data traces, transforming them into small data. Consequently, from a total of 51,600 tweets and 44,835 users, I was able to select 591 users and 666 tweets for coding.

Based on Gruzd (2009) and Gruzd et al. (2017), I created a name network using the software Gephi. A *name network*, also known as *who-mentions-whom* network, for Twitter data, is basically a network that connects users who mention each other (more on what a mention is below). I ran several statistical tests on this network, such as betweenness centrality, HITS and modularity. These initial tests also helped me know the network and how its actors related to

each other. Nonetheless, it was a simple statistical measure that produced the result that would lead the rest of the investigation: in-degree.

For now, it suffices to say that the in-degree of a Twitter user indicates how many times that user has been mentioned by others. Being most mentioned means being most talked about but also most retweeted and replied. The analysis showed that mere 1.94% (591) of the users were the destination of 74.3% (33,311) of the network's mentions. Who were these users and why do they cause so much reaction?

The narrated process is the expression of the choice between investigating the dynamics of the network at the level of the *poussière* or in its larger tendencies. On the one hand, I could investigate individual users' communications, interests, actions. To do so, I have considered coding a larger random selection of tweets. On the other hand, I could investigate these 591 users: why are they so talked about? Which larger tendencies do they represent within the network? To which messages and conversations are other users most reacting to?

I decided to pursue the second option: to investigate the network in its larger tendencies, to know who its main actors are, what they talk about, what leads other users to react. In this way, I hoped to have a better grasp of what helped the shaming move forward by understanding which messages made people engage with it. This choice was adequate to the research question in the measure that it allows the comprehension of *how* the online public shaming works by observing its major tendencies; moreover, it would allow me to know *who* are the main actors of the shaming, if it was moral entrepreneurs or grassroots movements, and what is their interest in the shaming.

To understand who these users were and why they were the concentration of the online conversation, I decided to investigate the very messages that mentioned them. For that, I selected

the tweets that mentioned the most mentioned users and were repeated in the network at least 10 times. In other words, messages that mentioned the user and were reproduced by others almost verbatim, via retweet, manual retweet or reply. This selection was followed by a thematic coding process that also considered who was tweeting and who was being mentioned in the tweets. The following analysis was then developed through two different movements: an inductive process, largely represented in Chapter 6, and a deductive process, whose results are in Chapter 7.

By the time both analyses were finished, I realized that Justine Sacco's case, by itself, was enough to nuance the phenomenon and give insights about what to look for in online public shamings—insights regarding its practices, actors and intentions. The in-depth analysis, therefore, had its sampling reduced to one single case. At this point, choosing Sacco's case as the first to analyze proved to be the right decision: the data proved to be rich and complex, allowing me to learn about users' strategies, tools, objectives, divisions, (self-)perceptions, practices and discourses.

This is the basic outline of the research. In the next sections, I detail some of the aspects of it.

3. Understanding Twitter

To understand how users and messages were selected from the network, it is beneficial to understand how Twitter—now X—worked in 2013. More specifically, how users could interact with each other through tweets, retweets (nowadays called reposts) and replies.¹¹ Twitter forms a network of interactions and understanding it is important to also understand some of the methodological choices made here.

¹¹ Twitter offers four different types of automatic messages (that is, messages that can be used through built-in features in Twitter): tweets, retweets, replies and quotes. I will not address quotes here because they represent a negligible part of the dataset: only twenty-four messages (0.046%).

When a user creates a Twitter account, they set up a profile page, with name, username, picture, brief description of the user (bio), date in which the user joined Twitter, number of followers and followed. Everything that the user tweets, retweets or replies will be published and visible on this page. See the example below:



Figure 2: A profile page for the character Jean Valjean, created for the purposes of this thesis. Besides the user’s name (Jean Valjean), username (@24601JeanVaJ) and bio (24601), the user also sees the tweets (e.g., “To love another person is to see the face of God”), retweets and quoted tweets published by himself.

Besides the profile page, every user also has access to a feed/timeline page. In it, the user visualizes the latest posts of the users they are following, and posts that the Twitter algorithm finds relevant to show to the user, including advertisements. At the top of the feed page, the user has space to type their own original messages to be published as tweets.

A *tweet* is the basic message that can be published on Twitter: “Tweets are the basic building block of all things Twitter” (X, n.d.-b). If a user wants to post an *original* message on Twitter—be it text, image, link or a mention of another user—they use the tweet. The tweet will

be posted on the user’s profile page and will show up on their followers’ feed. See, for example, the tweet from Jean Valjean:



Figure 3: A tweet posted by Jean Valjean

On the other hand, if a user wants to respond to a post (be it a tweet, a reply or a retweet) they can use the *reply* option. X states that replying “is a response to another post, and is one of the easiest ways to join in a conversation as it’s happening on X” (X, n.d.-c). All replies to a post are shown directly under the post, as visible in the example below.¹²

¹² Please notice that none of these Twitter profiles or messages exist: these are images created in Powerpoint to reproduce, simplify and anonymize the structure of a real conversation that took place in the #HasJustineLandedYet network. The only profile I really created for these purposes was Valjean’s.

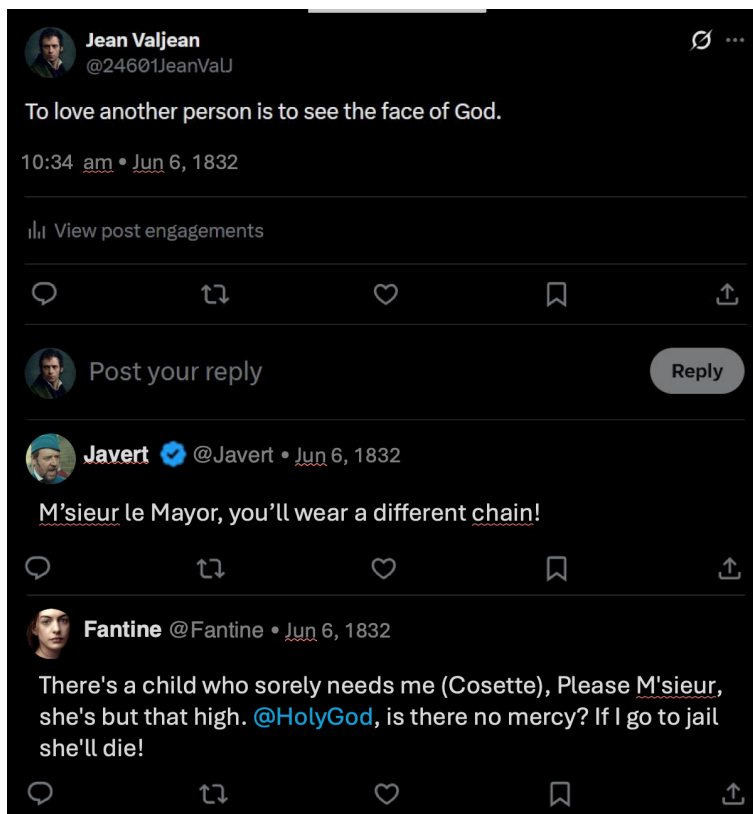


Figure 4: A Tweet by Jean Valjean and two replies: the first by Javert (“M’sieur le Mayor, you’ll wear a different chain!”) and the second one by Fantine (“There’s a child who sorely needs...”). The image shows that the replies are placed right under the original tweet.

Another Twitter option is the *retweet* (nowadays called “repost” by X). According to X, “This is a great way to pass along news and interesting discoveries...” (X, n.d.-a). Retweeting is possible through an automatic function in Twitter, accessed via a button in the shape of arrows pointing to each other. Using the example of when user A wants to repost Jean Valjean’s tweet on user A’s own profile, user A must click on the arrows button and opt to *retweet*. By retweeting, Jean Valjean’s tweet will show up verbatim on user A’s profile—automatically retweeting does not allow user A to do any changes or add any comments to Jean Valjean’s post.

However, it is also possible for a user to *manually* retweet a message. If user C wants to repost Jean Valjean’s message on C’s own profile, user C can copy and paste Jean Valjean’s tweet and post it. To indicate that this is a retweet, user C adds the @username of the user (in

this example, @24601JeanValJ) usually (but not necessarily) preceded by the expression “RT”. Like this, the manual retweeter can also add their own comments to the retweet or even make alterations to the original tweet’s message.

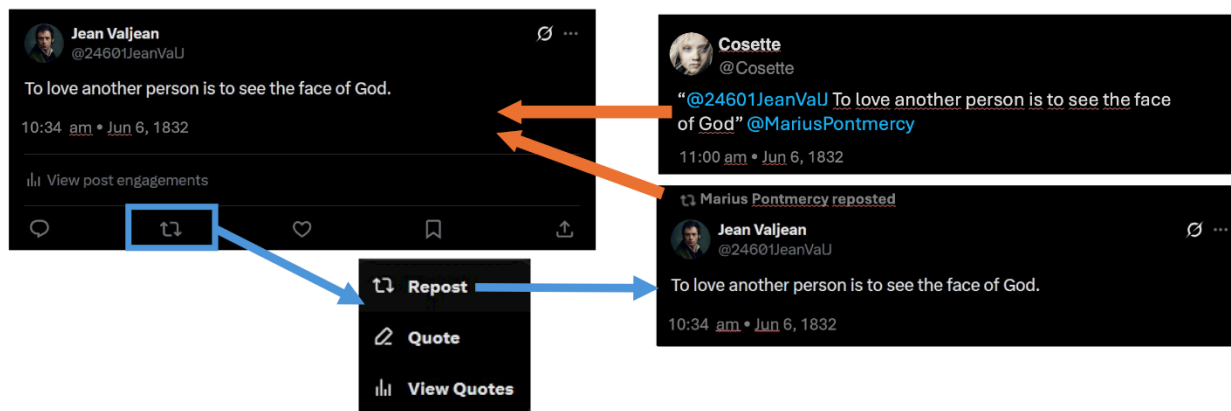


Figure 5: An example of a retweet (by Marius Pontmercy) and of a manual retweet (by Cosette) of the original post by Jean Valjean. When viewing the post by Jean Valjean, Marius clicked in the retweet button (arrows pointing to each other, in the blue rectangle) and reposted the tweet. On the other hand, Cosette manually retweeted Jean Valjean’s post, by copying and pasting it and not using the arrows button. She also added a small comment to Jean Valjean’s original tweet: Marius’ username (@MariusPontmercy). Because this is a manual retweet, Cosette’s message is treated by Twitter as an original tweet.

It is essential to notice that any type of Twitter message—tweets, replies, retweets or manual retweets—can be either replied, retweeted and manually retweeted, creating a network of reactions. See, for example, two reactions to Javert’s reply to Jean Valjean:

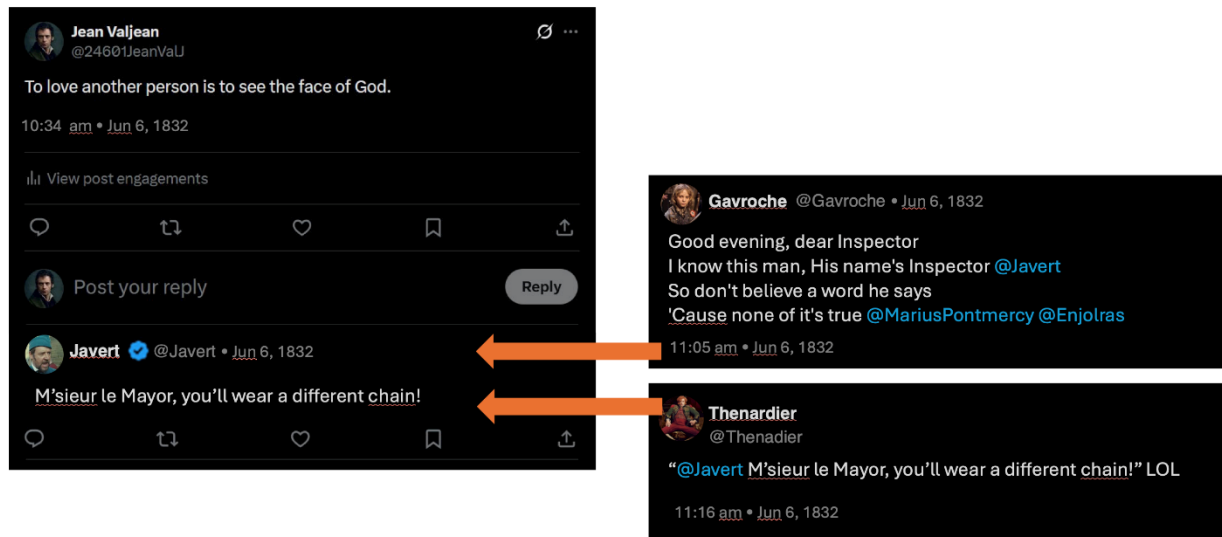


Figure 6: Two reactions to Javert's reply to Jean Valjean. Gavroche is replying to Javert's reply, and Thénardier is doing a manual retweet of Javert's reply and adding a comment ("LOL").

So, we can see that a reply (Javert's) has been replied (Gavroche) and retweeted (Thénardier). These subsequent retweets and replies could also be themselves retweeted, replied or manually retweeted. These reactions to the reactions end up creating a network among users, in which a conversation is maintained via tweets, replies and retweets.

This network of tweets, retweets, manual retweets and replies can be followed through the messages' *mentions*. A mention is when, in a Twitter message, there is a reference to another user, represented by their handle: @username. All Twitter reactions (replies and retweets) mention the user who is being reacted to. These mentions are carried from message to message, forming a chain. See, for example:

- A tweets: "What do you all think of Sacco?"
- B replies to A: "@A I think she is an idiot"
- C retweets B's reply: "RT @B @A I think she is an idiot"
- D retweets B's retweet: "RT @C RT @B @A I think she is an idiot"
- E replies D's retweet: "@D RT @C RT @B @A Maybe she is not"

What is important to understand is that replies and retweets *always* contain a mention of the original poster. Therefore, users who are heavily retweeted or replied are also heavily mentioned.

Besides the automatic registration of reactions in the network, when the users reply and retweet someone, the users themselves can choose to insert a *mention* in their message. This is the case in, for example, manual retweets, in which the users manually insert the handle of the original poster. Users may also insert a mention to indicate they are talking about someone. In the previous image, for example, Gavroche mentions @MariusPontmercy and @Enjolras in his reply, voluntarily mentioning them. Following the previous chain of example messages, here is an example of someone mentioning B in an independent tweet:

- G tweets mentioning B: “No idiots in the house, @B... Only racists.”

In sum, a mention is the automatic (replies, retweets) or voluntary insertion of a @username in a Twitter message.

As a final example, here is a mini network of mentions with all the messages used so far in this section. In the figure below, the arrows indicate who is mentioning whom:

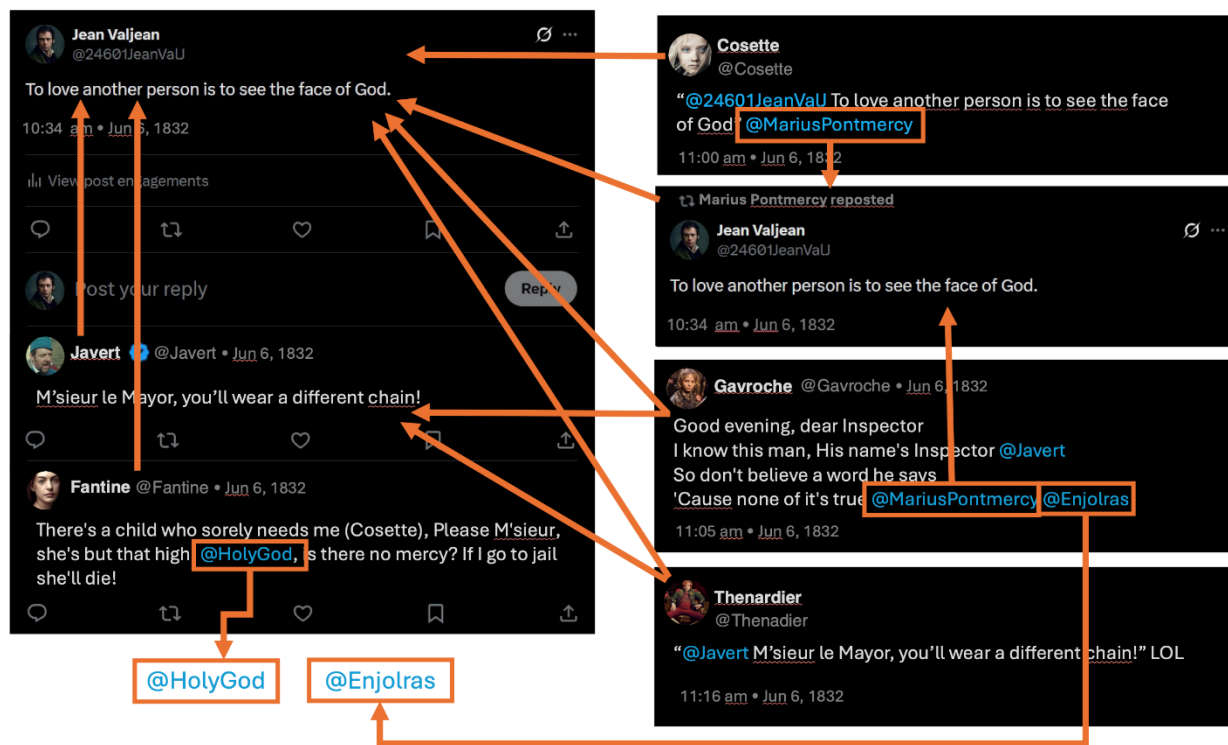


Figure 7: A mini network of mentions. Jean Valjean's is the original tweet. He is then mentioned by Javert and Fantine because they are replying to him. Fantine also mentions one other user, who is not in the conversation: @HolyGod. Notice that Fantine uses Cosette's name, but this is not a mention, because of the lack of an @ symbol. Cosette and Marius are mentioning Jean Valjean, since they are retweeting him. Cosette is also mentioning Marius. Gavroche and Thénardier are mentioning both Jean Valjean and Javert, since they are reacting to Javert's reply to Jean Valjean. Gavroche is also mentioning Marius and Enjolras.

This is the basic functioning of Twitter. There are other features in the platform that can form network-like structures, for example, who favourites whom or who follows whom. Notwithstanding those features, for this research, it is more interesting to observe the conversation through tweets, retweets, replies and mentions: what are users saying that get other users to react, republishing the post or commenting on it? What messages assume the form of a large-scale debate? What users are most mentioned? Investigating the network of messages will allow us to answer these and other questions.

4. The Dataset

The dataset, an .XLSX format file (an Excel spreadsheet workbook), contains 51,601 rows and each of them contains information related to one tweet, reply or retweet. The type of information about the tweets is distributed in twenty-nine columns, relating to Tweet ID (a unique number for each tweet), Tweet URL, Tweet Posted Time (UTC), Tweet Content, Tweet Mentions, Tweet URLs, Tweet Type, Retweets Received, Favourites Received, Reply Received, Quote Received, Bookmark Received, Impression Received, Tweet Location, Location Name, Location Coordinates, Tweet Language, User ID, Name, Username, User Bio, Verified or Non-Verified, Verified Type, Profile URL, User Followers, User Following, User Account Creation Date and Hashtags. To better understand what each of these variables mean, it is useful to see how one tweet is represented in the dataset. For example, see this retweet by Jean Valjean. On Twitter, one can see in the message's image some of the virtual representations of the variables:

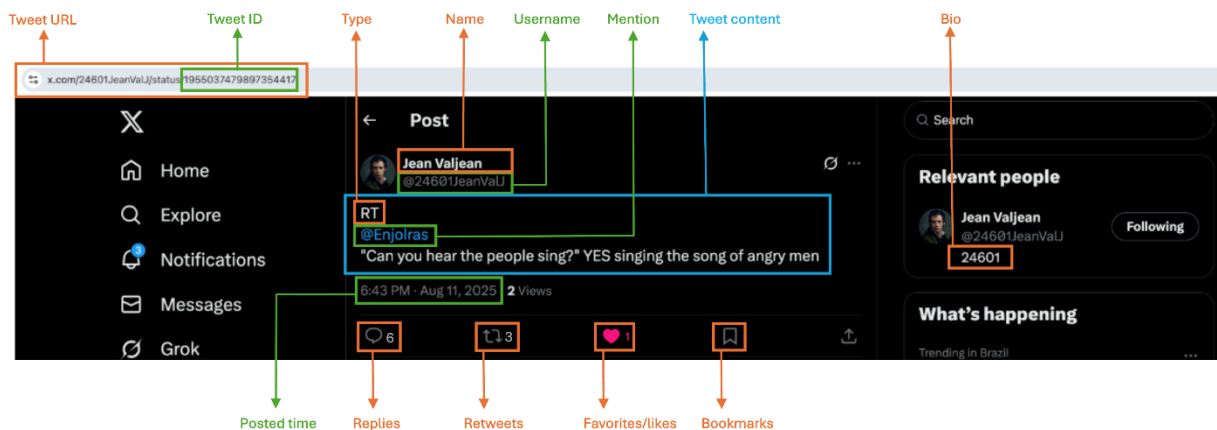


Figure 8: The variables seen in the tweet #1955037479897354417 by Jean Valjean. Notice that Valjean manually retweeted a tweet by Enjolras

Out of the total of 51,600 tweets, 35,608 (69.01%) have a mention of at least one other Twitter user. 7,005 (13.58%) received at least one “favourite” reaction. The majority of the messages are retweets (27,489—53.27%), followed by tweets (20,399—39.53%) and replies (3,688—7.15%).

Using the idea of *mentions*, as described above, I used the dataset to build a “name network”, also known as “who-mentions-whom”: “When applied to Twitter data the name network approach connects Twitter users if one mentions, retweets or replies another” (Gruzd et al., 2017, p. 521). Figure 9 exemplifies a mini who-mentions-whom network, showing users connected to whom they retweeted, replied or mentioned. Using the whole dataset to build this type of network would connect all users who mention others in their messages.

Nonetheless, building a network of mentions using this dataset faces two basic limitations. The first one derives from the dataset’s own structure. Indeed, the dataset contains a variable named *mentions*, which indicates which Twitter handles (@username) are used in a tweet. However, the dataset does not register a mention to a user whose account no longer exists. See for example, this reference to @GoGo: “Well played, @GoGo. Well. Played. #SlowClap” (user 141). In this case, user 141 mentions @GoGo but the mentions column in the dataset does not register it because the @GoGo user account no longer exists.¹³

The second limitation is that only Twitter handles are considered mentions. Other types of referencing or the link to other means of communication are not captured. For example: “Breaking: Fox to launch View-like talk show starring *Justine Sacco, Megyn Kelly, Paula Dean & Aaryn Gries*” (user 171). As it is visible, this tweet has no handles, so the mentions to the Fox television network, Sacco, Megyn Kelly, Paula Deen and Aaryn Gries are not captured by the dataset. References to actors outside of Twitter or that do not use the handle are therefore excluded from the analysis.

¹³ By counting the number of “@” symbols in the content column, it is possible to see that there are potentially 51,304 mentions in the tweets’ content. On the other hand, in the mentions column, we have only a total of 48,174 mentions. This means that 3,130 mentions (6.1%) are possibly missing in the mentions column.

5. Building a Network Graph

The network of mentions can be represented by a graph. As Cherven (2015, p. 10)

explains:

Stated simply, network graphs are collections of nodes (often called vertices) that are connected by edges (sometimes called connections, links, or ties) to form a graph. Nodes can be thought of as individual elements in a network that might represent persons, places, or objects that collectively define a network. A very simple example would be this:

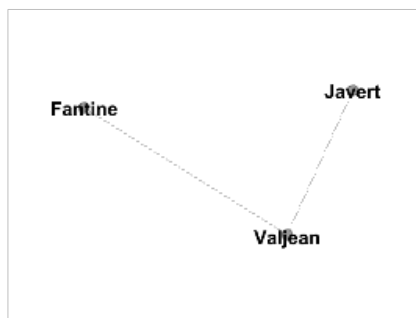


Figure 9: A simple network with three nodes (Valjean, Javert and Fantine) and two edges (Javert-Valjean, Fantine-Valjean).

This graph represents the relationship between the three characters from the *Les Misérables*. In the graph, the characters are the *nodes* or *vertices*, and the relationships between them are represented by *edges/connections/links/ties*. Valjean has a relationship with both Javert and Fantine, but that the latter two have no relationship between themselves.

The #HasJustineLandedYet network, however, is too big to be built, analysed and represented analogically. The use of computational power is necessary. Therefore, to do the present analysis, I used Gephi.¹⁴

¹⁴ This software facilitates network analysis without the need for computational coding. Gephi was created “...to provide some network analysis methods to social scientists, that would not require learning graph theory” (Jacomy et al., 2014, p. 1). Gephi produces network graphs and provides statistical tools to analyse them. “Gephi is a tool for data analysts and scientists keen to explore and understand graphs. Like Photoshop™ but for graph data, the user interacts with the representation, manipulate the structures, shapes and colors to reveal hidden patterns. The goal is to help data analysts to make hypothesis, intuitively discover patterns, isolate structure singularities or faults during data sourcing. It is a complementary tool to traditional statistics, as visual thinking with interactive interfaces is now recognized to facilitate reasoning” (Gephi.org, 2008).

To create the network, Gephi needs to receive a couple of lists: a list of nodes, representing the actors in the network, and a list of edges, representing the relationships between them (Cherven, 2015). The above example can be represented by the following two lists:

NODES	
ID	Label
0	Valjean
1	Javert
2	Fantine

EDGES		
Source	Target	Type
0	1	Undirected
0	2	Undirected

That is, first, one must identify the nodes by numbers and label them (e.g., the node 0 represents Valjean) and identify the edges' relationships between the pairs of nodes (e.g., node 0—Valjean—is connected to node 1—Javert). The edges must be characterized as either directed or undirected (the “Type” column) (Cherven, 2015). An undirected relationship is a mutual relationship (also called “symmetric” (Hanneman & Riddle, 2014)). For example, a network formed with Facebook friendships is undirected: A cannot be friends with B on Facebook if B is not also A’s friend; the relationship is necessarily mutual. A directed edge, on the other hand, represents a relationship with a direction, for example, when A follows B on Twitter, B does not necessarily follow A. Therefore, the direction of the edge is from A to B. In the latter case, there is a source node (who follows) and a target node (who is followed). In the *Les Misérables* example in this thesis, we have a directed network since the criterion (one character mentioning another) is not mutual.

I produced two .CSV format files (plain text, comma-separated values) to be opened by Gephi: a list of nodes and a list of edges, meaning that:

- (1) Every Twitter user who tweeted, retweeted or replied mentioning someone is a source node.
- (2) Every Twitter user who was mentioned in a tweet, retweet or reply is a node.
- (3) Every mention represents an edge. Thus, a single tweet can generate more than one edge if more than one user is mentioned in it; likewise, a tweet might generate no edges at all if it does not mention any users. In this case, there is an isolated node.
- (4) All edges were entered as directed, from the person who mentions to the person who is mentioned.

Gephi automatically transforms repeated edges into weights. So, if user A mentions user B 50 times, that is still represented by one edge, but with a weight of 50.

Consider the miniature *Les Misérables* example of a mentions network, with Valjean's tweet, its answers and retweets (figure 9). This mentions network is represented in Gephi as the image below:

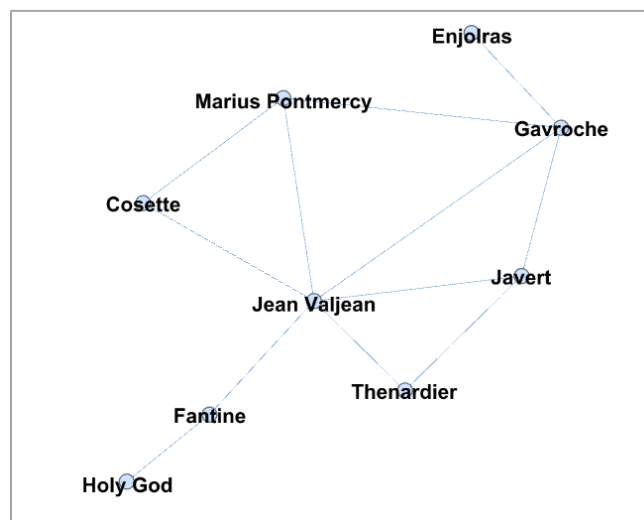


Figure 10: The *Les Misérables* mention network represented by Gephi

This is a small example of how Gephi works for Twitter. For the entire #HasJustineLandedYet dataset, the scale is much larger: in the preparatory Excel spreadsheets, 30,442 nodes (users) and 48,174 edges (mentions) were found. After importing them into Gephi, the software found the same numbers. Now, after importing the list of nodes and edges into Gephi, the graph can be visualized and explored¹⁵. The image below shows the #HasJustineLandedYet network, which is much denser than the initial small example from *Les Misérables*:

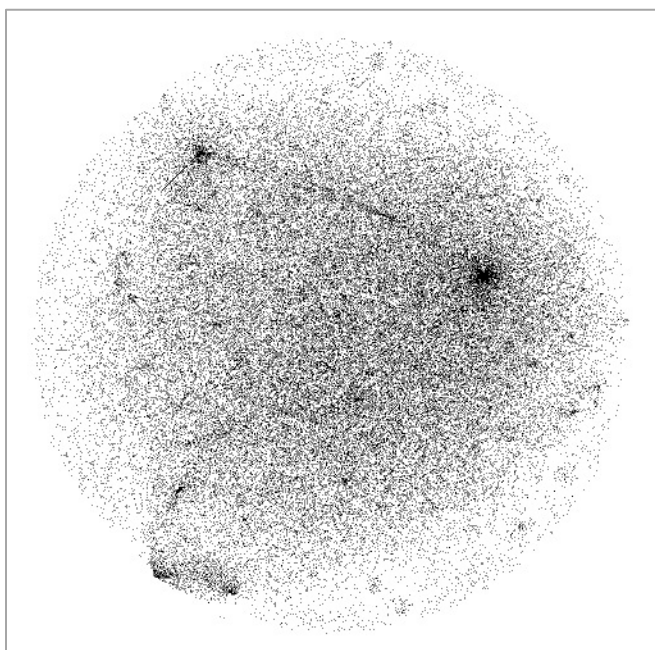


Figure 11: The #HasJustineLandedYet network on Gephi.

¹⁵ To make the network visible, it is necessary to apply a layout that arranges its elements according to a few parameters – otherwise, the result is only a black, ultra-dense square. A layout algorithm must be used, then. Its function is to place the nodes “...according to some structure across the graphical space. A good tool provides the capability to the users to restructure the network in order to visualize it in a way in which the required parts of the graph are enhanced, similar nodes occupy the same subspace in the graphical space, and all the nodes are clearly distinguishable from each other” (Khokhar, 2015, p. 48). In the #HasJustineLandedYet network, I have used Force Atlas 2, which is considered to be an adequate layout tool for large networks (Khokhar, 2015) and social networks (Jacomy et al., 2014). I used the following configurations on Force Atlas 2: scaling = 10.0; gravity = 0.005; edge weight influence = 2.0; LinLog mode on; dissuade hubs mode on; prevent overlap mode on; stronger gravity mode on.

For now, it is possible to see that the network has some prominent users—the darkest spots in the sphere. The largest and darkest spot, on the middle right, is the most mentioned user in the network: @JustineSacco herself.

After building the network graph, I ran several statistical analyses, which allowed me to have an initial understanding of it. Nonetheless, a simple metric provided a paradoxical result and guided the transformation of big data into small data. This measure was the nodes' in-degree.

6. Analyzing In-Degree: Who is Mentioned in the Network?

In undirected data, the *degree* of a node is its total number of connections (edges); in directed data, a node's *in-degree* shows how many ties an actor *receives* (in this network, how many times a user is mentioned), and the *out-degree* shows how many connections flow from the node to others (in this network, how many times a user mentions others) (Cherven, 2015; Hanneman & Riddle, 2014). “If an actor receives many ties, they are often said to be prominent, or to have high prestige. That is, many other actors seek direct ties to them, and this may indicate their importance” (Hanneman & Riddle, 2014, p. 59). To be clear, in the present network, since the edges represent mentions, the in-degree of a node is how many times that node (the Twitter user) has been mentioned by other unique users¹⁶. The out-degree means, then, how many times that node mentions others.

I used the network graph to compare the presence of actors who are mentioned vs. actors who mention. Indeed, there is a stark contrast between the two groups:

¹⁶ The in-degree does not count the total number of times a user is mentioned, but only how many other unique users mention the former. For example, if user A mentions user B ten times, B's in-degree is = 1, not = 10. The total number of times a user is mentioned is represented by the weighted in-degree. That happens because Gephi transforms repeated edges (the 10 mentions from A to B) into weights. Thus, if A mentions B 10 times, B's in-degree = 1, but B's weighted in-degree = 10.

- Out of 30,442 users, 20,531 (67.44%) mention at least one other user (that is, have an out-degree larger than zero);
- On the other hand, only 6,373 (20.93%) are mentioned by at least one other user (that is, have an in-degree larger than zero).

This contrast between who mentions and who is mentioned is starker if one considers only Twitter users who are mentioned by at least ten other unique users (i.e., have an in-degree equal to or larger than ten). Despite a total of 30,442 nodes in the network, only 591 (1.94%) of them are mentioned by at least 10 other users. Paradoxically, this small portion of users is the destination of 33,311 edges, that is, 74.3% of all mentions of the network. At the same time, these users are responsible for starting only 1,482 edges, or 3.3% of the total. In other words, even though these 591 users produce a small quantity of mentions, for some reason, they are the main destination of other users' mentions. This contrast between total users (in-degree ≥ 0) and users that are mentioned by at least ten others (in-degree ≥ 10) can be represented by the two following graphs:

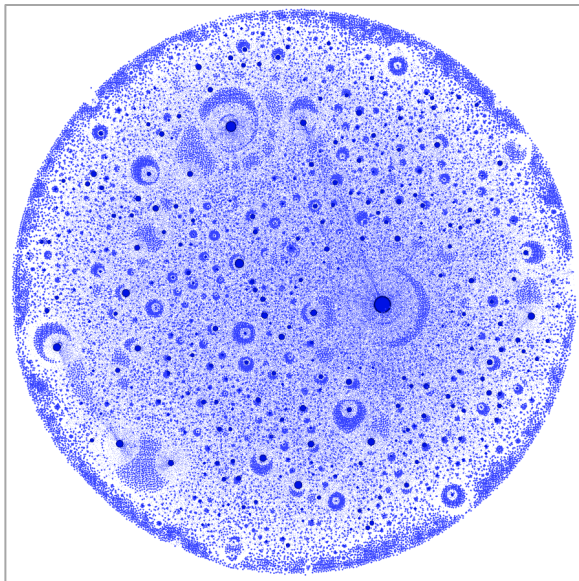


Figure 12: The network with all nodes (users) and edges (mentions). Nodes are sized according to in-degree.

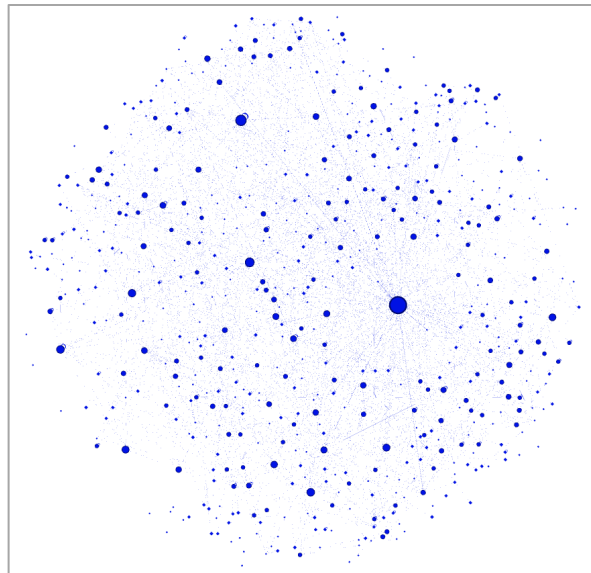


Figure 13: The network filtered to show only users with an in-degree ≥ 10 . Nodes are sized according to in-degree.

If the intention is to understand how an online public shaming works, how do people organize, who leads, who follows, what moves them, then it is essential to follow actors who are able to make other actors react. A Twitter user can post 100 tweets about Justine Sacco, and that is a contribution to the online public shaming, but only an isolated one if none of these tweets are liked, retweeted or replied to—if there is no reaction or engagement to them. By investigating actors with high out-degree (actors who mention others), the focus would be on manifestations about Sacco that do not necessarily create more engagement, interact with others, or cause interest. On the other hand, by investigating actors with a high in-degree (people who are heavily mentioned by others), the focus is on who is causing others to react, to engage, to replicate content. To answer who is being replied to, retweeted or mentioned in droves is more interesting than investigating isolated manifestations of single users, since a high in-degree shows, then, mass tendencies, not individual ones.

7. Selecting Tweets, Retweets and Replies

It is interesting, then, to investigate the users who lead other users to react. A cut can be made, therefore, to investigate only the users with a minimum of mentions and the tweets that mention them. Initially, then, I filtered the network only to show users with an in-degree equal to or greater than ten, as shown in Figure 13, above. Nonetheless, considering the number of mentions these users are receiving (33,311), that means that there are possibly tens of thousands of messages mentioning these users. Therefore, solely restricting the number of users does not make the material manageable: it is also necessary to find a way to select these messages, making them into small data. Considering this need and the fact that this is an investigation of major tendencies, reactions and interactions of the network, it makes sense that only messages that were minimally repeated enter the analysis.

To be sure, these users are sometimes mentioned in single tweets that are not replicated by anyone else. It is possible to be mentioned by ten different users in ten tweets with different contents. Conversely, it is also possible to be mentioned by ten different users in ten identical tweets with the same content. The most obvious case is the retweet: if ten users retweet @A, there will be ten identical retweets by different users mentioning @A. This shows the popularity not only of @A, but also of the message being repeated. Users often repeat messages by retweeting, but also by copying and pasting the original messages in replies or manually retweeting.

Considering this, I verified each tweet where these users are mentioned and, among them, identified the messages that have been replicated at least ten times. For example, @AidforAfrica was mentioned in a total of 1,864 tweets. The tweet “RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for

Justine!” has been reproduced 198 times, by different users. This tweet was selected for the analysis. On the other hand, tweets repeated less than ten times were not selected.

	D	E	F	G	P	R
1	Day	Time	Tweet Content	Tweet Source		Target
1260	21 Dec 201		"Shrewd move, someone's bought & had the page diverted to @AidforAfrica POSITIVE actions #HasJustineLanded"	"http://"		AidforAfrica
1261	21 Dec 201		"Show your support! Donate to join @AidforAfrica in helping the people of Sub Saharan Africa. #HasJustineLandedYet"	"http://"		AidforAfrica
1425	21 Dec 201		"RT @AidforAfrica: Thank you to creator of Donate to Aid for Africa and help #ENDAIDS in Africa. #HasJustineLandedYe"	"http://"		AidforAfrica
2067	24 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2068	23 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2069	23 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2070	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2071	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2072	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2073	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2074	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2075	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2076	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2077	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2078	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2079	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2080	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2081	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2082	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2083	22 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2084	21 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica
2085	21 Dec 201		"RT @YourAnonNews: The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine! #..."	"..."		AidforAfrica

Figure 14: After identifying the users mentioned at least ten times (in this case, @AidforAfrica, seen in the “Target” column), I selected the tweets that are repeated at least ten times, as the ones indicated by the large orange rectangle (in the “Tweet Content” column).

This process was easy when dealing with absolutely identical tweets. As seen in figure 14, to detect these tweets, all that was necessary was to classify the tweets’ content in alphabetical order: identical tweets would, then, group together, and be easily selected and counted. As the image shows, the retweet from @YourAnonNews is simply repeated row after row, allowing it to be easily counted. This procedure was applied to all users. The problem surfaced when dealing with repeated tweets with small variations. Indeed, in several cases, I found tweets in which the user would add to the repeated message expressions of approval and laughter, such as “Ha!”, “hahaha”, “LMAO” (laughing my ass off), “WORD!”, or “Okay, this was pretty clever”. In the cases of replies and retweets with these additions, because these expressions mean approval of the tweet’s message, I counted the retweets and replies as repetitions of the original tweet. Many tweets with minor variations were of this type. On the other hand, I did not count messages that modified or added to the repeated message’s content. For example, I did not count messages that added information about the case or introduced new

jokes, such as the italicized excerpt of the following message: “*she erased her job description too* RT @YourAnonNews Breaking: @JustineSacco’s AIDS tweet was deleted. Everyone say HI!” (user 300).

By the end of this process, I had selected 666 (1.29%) tweets that mentioned the main users and were repeated at least ten times. It is hard to determine the total impact of these tweets on the network, but it is possible to know that these messages have been retweeted 26,059 times. This shows that, despite having chosen a small quantity of users and tweets to be analyzed, these were hugely influential.

8. Coding

After selecting the tweets, I proceeded to the coding of the material. Coding tweets is a process with particular challenges. The first challenge is understanding typical practices and discourses of the online sphere. Shamers use abundant abbreviations and slang, such as LMFAO (laughing my fucking ass off) or SMH (shake my head). Some tweets contained emojis, such as 👍, 🎵 and 🗣️. Likewise, a substantial part of the tweets contained hyperlinks—at least 15,982 (30.97%) tweets in the network. These hyperlinks could redirect to images, videos, short gif animations, or to other websites with news pieces, opinion columns, or other social media. The tweet had to be interpreted considering the diverse media and the information contained in these other websites. Many times, the extra information brought in by hyperlink was essential to comprehend what the user meant with their tweet. Codes were created considering all these elements: tweet text, attached media, hyperlinks and corresponding webpages.

However, at times, the hyperlinks would not work—the linked page no longer existed, and the images were not available. In those cases, I used the Wayback Machine¹⁷ to try to recover the linked websites and images, with more success with the links than the images. A similar issue occurred with some of the tweets: the dataset sometimes did not contain the complete text of the tweet. To verify it, I had to consult the hyperlink on Twitter itself. Nonetheless, some of the tweets or user accounts had been deleted and were inaccessible¹⁸. Some of these tweets had in themselves an understandable message despite the missing information; in others, it was impossible to comprehend the meaning without the accompanying image or hyperlink. In the latter case, I have coded the tweet as “trash” and did not use it in the analysis.

Another difficulty was understanding the *context* of the messages. Many tweets were part of an ongoing joke that users knew beforehand. For example, user 23 refers to “Diane in 7A as the most popular air traveler of 2013.” Who is Diane in 7A? She is an imaginary passenger from by TV show producer Elan Gale during a 2013 live tweet hoax invented, when Gale pretended to be having an argument with an imaginary passenger during a flight: Diane, at seat 7A. Cases like this happened throughout the dataset: users made reference to TV shows, songs, movies, and cultural events. I have tried as much as possible to understand these references; the website Know Your Meme was a great companion in this pursuit, being a crowd-sourced database that documents and explains online culture.

¹⁷ The Wayback Machine (<https://web.archive.org/>) is a digital library organized by the non-profit organization The Internet Archive (n.d.). According to the organization, it has been archiving internet content since 1996 and it contains, as of this date, 835 billion web pages. Internet users can create a free account and contribute to the site by uploading media to it. The site also archives books and TV content.

¹⁸ This problem seemed to get worse over time, especially after the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk, when thousands of users left the platform. After this change, tweets that I previously had access to disappeared.

Furthermore, another practice I used, in order to fully understand the tweets, was to investigate who their authors were and who the tweets were referring to—that is, who are the participants in the online conversation. In several cases, knowing who was speaking and who was being mentioned revealed itself to be essential for understanding what was being said and the impact of it. For example, one of the most shared tweets of the network, “Olivia Pope: ‘Gurl, you’re on your own with this one’” (@kerrywashington), makes much more sense if we know not only that Olivia Pope is a popular character of the TV show *Scandal*, but also that @kerrywashington is the username of actress Kerry Washington, who plays Pope. Similarly, it is necessary to know who Aid for Africa is to understand the hundreds of tweets mentioning it and asking for donations, as well to understand the moment that @AidforAfrica—the NGO’s username—enters the network and uses the hashtag to draw attention to its cause. The investigation of users’ identities helped understand their tweets and to clarify who were the users in the network that caused most reactions. If the intention with the in-degree selection was to highlight the actors that caused the most reactions within the network, the thematic coding with attention to *who is speaking about whom* allows understanding who these actors are and why they are important. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this strategy had limits: most Twitter users are not public figures, and, even if I was able to figure out their professions and locations, for example, not much could be deducted from that. Therefore, in my analysis I focused on public personalities, such as actress Kerry Washington, media vehicles, NGOs, and governmental departments.

The initial coding, made using NVivo qualitative analysis software, aimed at describing as closely as possible what the user was saying, in all its aspects. If telling a joke, what the joke was about; if it cursed at Sacco, what type of cursing was it; if it gave any type of information

about the case, what was this information; if the user demonstrated surprise with Sacco's tweet or with the case; if it encouraged charity; if it contained a meme, a print of the tweet or a link to a news article; and, if it accused Sacco of racism, etc. At this phase, the research took an inductive path, allowing the empirical material to dictate the extracted codes.

In a second moment, with the codes in hand, I proceeded to group them into families of meaning. For example, the many codes describing jokes (such as "parody", "rhyme", "irony") were grouped together under the larger code "Humour"; the codes describing information sharing (such as "Sacco is fired", "Sacco deleted her account") were grouped under the larger code "Information". This effort, nonetheless, was limited to joining codes with very similar meaning. To reduce the codes into even larger groups, I took a further step: I described what was present in the tweets within each code, trying, in this way, to create a description of the code itself. These descriptions were filled with examples of the tweets, demonstrating what was being seen in each code. Later, re-reading these descriptions, I was able to make stronger connections between the codes. I manually piled up descriptions that were related, in a process that, before becoming clear, was full of questions and possible relationships. At first, the groups were still many, but with time, I was able to see larger streams of discourse within the tweets. In the picture below, the descriptions are already grouped together into the categories that would later help form the first analysis chapter:

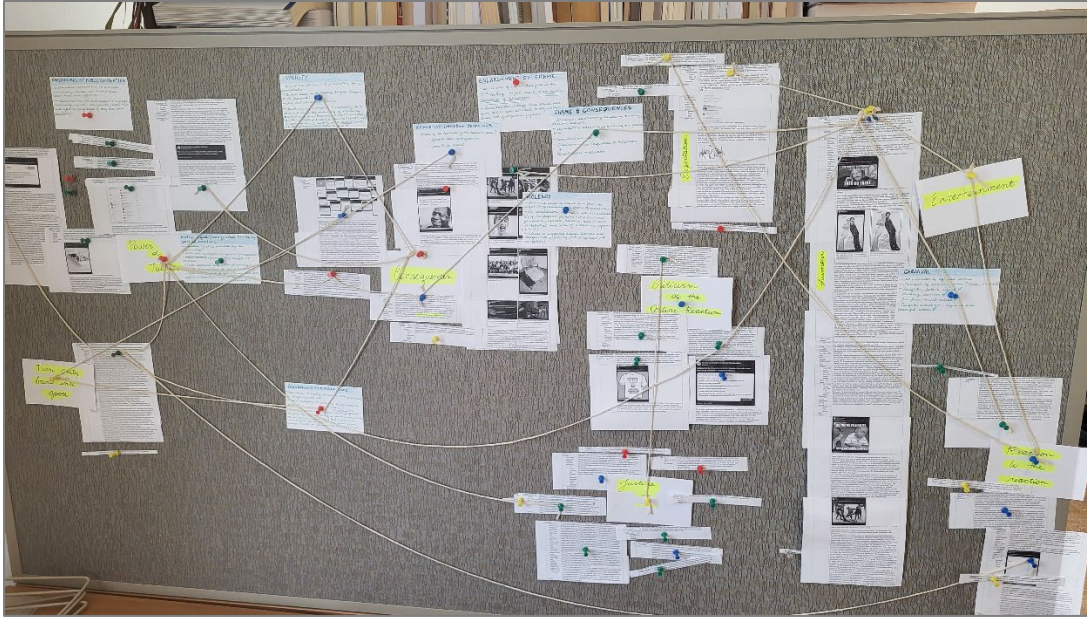


Figure 15: Organizing the codes into groups. The highlighted cards show the larger categories in which I grouped the codes, from left to right: “Turn something bad into good;” “Power of Twitter;” “Consequences;” “Justine is...;” “Expectation;” “Humour;” “Entertainment;” and, “Reaction to the reaction”.

The first analysis chapter, therefore, was written after I was able to group together the codes into larger families—basically four types of discourse observed in the shaming. The chapter’s text is, in sum, the description of the codes I had done in the previous step but condensed and, with its connections, made explicit. That first analysis chapter, therefore, was the result of an inductive analysis and synthesis of the empirical material.

Once this material was well-understood and analyzed, I was able to return to the concepts and categories described in the moral crusades and charivari chapters. Going back to them, I tabulated the categories and concepts that appeared in the chapters and deductively started to compare them to the tweets and codes that the empirical material had. Some characteristics of the phenomenon already had a strong relationship with part of the theoretical concepts, which was visible since the inductive analysis. That was the case for the role of humour in humiliating Sacco, which strongly resembled the hostile derision of charivaris. The pertinence of other concepts, such as rule creation, only became clear in their after a deeper analysis of the material,

in which I had to combine the themes brought in by the tweets and the actors participating in the tweets. Indeed, I could only understand Sacco's shaming as a moment in a larger process of rule creation when it became clear (1) the role Black Twitter had in the shaming and its quest against racism in America and (2) the context of activism, represented by NGOs, in which Sacco's tweet was inserted. These two pieces of information are present in the tweets, but they only become apparent once the historical context of Black Twitter is understood and the activities of the NGOs are observed.

In this way, the second analysis chapter relied on a deductive process that depended on a deep comprehension of the empirical material and the use of insights from the literature review, specifically regarding who shames, how, and why, to ultimately understand the comparison between moral crusades, charivaris and shamings.

9. Ethical aspects

The internet in general, and social media specifically, brought many new tools and insights for social research, but it also brought new ethical matters.

At first, one may think that using tweets, retweets, and responses does not present any particular ethical problem, since Twitter profiles are, by default, public, and their data is publicly accessible by Twitter's API (Ahmed et al., 2018). However, as boyd and Crawford (2012) explain, "Just because it is accessible does not make it ethical" (p. 671). Boyd and Crawford summarize by saying that "...there is a considerable difference between being in public (i.e. sitting in a park) and being public (i.e. actively courting attention)". The fact that something is published online does not mean that the author meant it to be spread to all spheres of life, or that the researcher can use it. Consider, for example, that social media users do not necessarily understand the privacy settings of the platforms, or that they might only be connecting to family

and friends, not expecting a third party to observe the communication. Moreover, the users might believe that they are protected by the use of passwords or private groups; they also might be unaware that a joke or opinion shared 12 years earlier can be used as evidence later, despite their current opinions about the topic.

In social media sites, research faces problems relating to informed consent, anonymity and the risk of harm, as Townsend and Wallace explain (2017). Consent is a complicated matter in these studies, the ones using big data above all: how to obtain consent from thousands of people? Even in small data studies, it is problematic to get consent since users might not respond researchers' messages or might have deactivated their accounts by the time of the data analysis (Ahmed et al., 2018). Moreover, some social media users understand that asking for consent is about protecting the copyright of their posts (Beninger, 2017). Once the data is collected, completely anonymizing it is difficult (Townsend & Wallace, 2017), and becomes even more so if we consider that platforms like Twitter demand, in their terms and conditions, that tweets are published by researchers using the verbatim text and identifying the user (Ahmed et al., 2018; Townsend & Wallace, 2017).

Townsend and Wallace (2017) suggest considering that the higher the risk of harm for the social media users, or the more vulnerable they are, the higher is the researcher's responsibility. And the risk of harm is also greater "...when dealing with more sensitive data that when revealed to new audiences might expose a social media user to the risk of embarrassment, reputational damage, or prosecution (to name a few examples)" (p. 195).

To face these difficulties, I used the guidelines for online empirical research proposed by Townsend and Wallace (2017). For them, to consider the privacy and the risk presented by the research, one must ask:

(a) “Can the social media user reasonably expect to be observed by strangers”

(Townsend & Wallace, 2017, p. 197)? Townsend and Wallace (2017) explain that to know if something is public or not comes down to verifying if the user can expect to be externally observed. That is not a perfect criterion, since users themselves worry about social media being “...nearly entirely public and the difficulty of permanently deleting information” (Beninger, 2017). It will always be hard to differentiate something intended to be public from something the user failed to protect as private. To consider the data as public or not, Townsend & Wallace (2017) suggest considering:

Are the data you wish to access on an open forum or a platform (such as on Twitter), or are they located within a closed or a private group (e.g., within Facebook) or a closed discussion forum? Is the group or the forum password protected? Would platform users expect other visitors to have similar interests or issues to themselves? Does the group have a gatekeeper (or admin) that you could turn to for approval and advice? How have users set up their security settings? Data accessed from open and public online locations such as Twitter present less ethical issues than data that are found in closed or private online spaces. Similarly, data posted by public figures such as politicians, musicians, and sportspeople on their public social media pages are less likely to be problematic because these data are intended to reach as wide an audience as possible. If the data that the researcher wishes to access are held within a group for which one would need to gain membership approval, or if the group is password protected, there are more ethical issues to take into consideration (Townsend & Wallace, 2017, pp. 198–199).

(b) “Are the research participants vulnerable? (i.e. children or vulnerable adults)”

(Townsend & Wallace, 2017, p. 197). As happens with online consent, excluding vulnerable people from the data might be challenging, since social media makes it difficult to identify individuals (Townsend & Wallace, 2017).

(c) “Is the subject matter sensitive?” (Townsend & Wallace, 2017, p. 197). It must be considered that some topics are fairly innocuous harm-wise (debating about books or exchanging recipes) while others might represent a greater danger to people’s reputation, safety or even criminal record: commission of crimes, sexual activities, and political activism (Townsend & Wallace, 2017).

Considering all of this, the researcher must find a way to collect, archive and responsibly analyze data:

If there is a risk of harm to individuals whose data you are using, you must either (a) paraphrase all data that is republished in research outputs, having taken steps to ensure that the paraphrased data does not lead interested parties to the individual's online profile; (b) seek informed consent from each person, should you wish to (or need to) use their data in its original form in research outputs or (c) consider using a more traditional research approach where consent and confidentiality can be more safely ensured (Townsend & Wallace, 2017, pp. 200–2001).

Twitter is a social media site considered public in its nature since the access to content does not depend on passwords, the profiles are public by default, and researchers can access data by the Twitter API (Application Programming Interface, a way for other applications to exchange data with Twitter) (Ahmed et al., 2018; Townsend & Wallace, 2017). Some users are private individuals; others are public personalities or institutions. The content, in Sacco's case, is political and potentially controversial. The discussion forum was not password protected. It is not possible to obtain consent from all participants, due to their massive number. All these features indicate a mostly public nature of the data and not a mostly-private one. Moreover, an important aspect of this dataset must be considered in relation to the idea of "publicity" as courting public attention: the use of a hashtag.

Hashtags can be considered exactly what boyd and Crawford (2012) classify as truly public, that is, "actively courting attention". When users place hashtags in their tweets, they are joining a larger conversation topic and making their tweets more visible. For Townsend and Wallace (2017) "It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that such tweets have public character: the authors expect and want to be observed by strangers in order to make a political point that they want others to read" (p. 205). In that case, boyd and Crawford allow using verbatim tweets in academic publications so long as the the ID of non-public figures are not used. Therefore, the use

of hashtags is considered to allow the use of the tweets' text verbatim with protection of the user's identity. This is, thus, the position taken in this research:

- (1) *Messages using hashtags*: verbatim use of the messages, anonymizing the user, except for public figures;
- (2) *Messages not using hashtags*: paraphrases of the messages, anonymizing the user, except for public figures.

CHAPTER 6: The Reaction to the Tweet and the Reaction to the Reaction: The Many Conversations Around Justine Sacco

1. Introduction

As said in the previous chapter, my first analytical step was to do an inductive analysis of the #HasJustineLandedYet dataset. Very little literature has been written about online public shamings, and no solid theoretical framework has yet been proposed. The phenomenon itself is scarcely described, as shown in Chapter 2, with authors referring to slightly different cases and arriving at varied conclusions. Considering these aspects, I decided that, at first, it was best to let myself be guided by the empirical material itself instead of trying to immediately fit concepts to it. What could the data show? What were the dynamics inside the shaming? What was important to the users themselves? What would they talk about? These were all questions that would only be answered by an inductive analysis.

During the coding process, it became clearer, with time, that four main types of discourse prevailed in the dataset. Indeed, one would expect that the shaming constituted a massive attack against Sacco—multiple messages rectifying, scolding, cursing, and even threatening her. This expectation proved to be true—there are numerous tweets dedicated to disparaging Sacco, calling her an idiot and a racist, celebrating her dismissal, and even making references to physical violence. Moreover, this disparagement encompasses diverse aspects of her life, going beyond the AIDS tweet that originated the shaming.

The analysis, however, showed that the shaming was not reduced to only demeaning Sacco—far from it. Several other *conversations* took place during the event: users directed their speech not only to Sacco but also to each other. That is, in these conversations among users, Sacco was just a theme, not an interlocutor. As a *theme*, Sacco led users to share information,

discuss more purposeful responses to the case, ponder it and entertain themselves. Considering both the speech directed at Sacco and the speech among users, four main types of conversations showed up in the data: informative, righteous, entertaining and metadiscourse.

Informative speech was seen whenever users shared information about the case, such as Sacco's firing and her flight landing. Righteous speech refers to all conversations that address Sacco's tweet as a problem to be solved, as an evil to be corrected. In this type of speech, there are demeaning conversations about Sacco, discussions of the consequences imposed on her, and the proposals of better, larger solutions. Entertaining speech refers to all instances in which Sacco was used as comic material or as an entertainment product by Twitter users—following the case became a great communal party in which ingenious and funny messages were exchanged. Finally, users also reflected on the shaming itself: its actors, its correctness and its power.

These types of speech overlap with each other—that is, the same tweet can contain more than one, or even all, types of discourse at the same time. Users were experts in demeaning Sacco *while* sharing information; increasing AIDS awareness by making jokes; pondering who was propelling the shaming while sharing a meme. Indeed, despite Twitter only allowing 140 characters per tweet in 2013, tweets were able to carry multiple functions. The division between types of discourse proposed here, thus, is only for descriptive purposes.¹⁹ I isolate each category to better approach it, but this does not mean that the discourses are, in themselves, separated.

¹⁹Before we begin the exploration of the tweets, two notes about the editing of this chapter must be made. (1) By their informal and fast nature, tweets contain many errors, neologisms, slang and emojis. This unusual use of language is important for the full understanding of the messages. Therefore, the large majority of tweets directly quoted here were copied and pasted into the text without alterations. This means that any grammatical errors, unconventional language, neologisms, slangs and emojis are in the original source and will not be indicated by the Latin term "*sic*". (2) Tweets, in the original Twitter formatting, are never in italics or bold font. Thus, all the italics in the direct citations in this text are mine.

In the next sections, I will examine each of these conversations, starting with *informative* speech.

2. Informative Speech

One use of Twitter was as to share information about the case in its various moments. Users shared news links that summarized the case, for those others who were “late” (users 122 and 123), “missed” what had happened (users 124 and 125), or did not know why #HasJustineLandedYet was trending (users 531, 459, 126, and 81). They also informed others when Sacco was fired (users 127, 430, 128, 129, 130, 97, 131, 13, 89, @CTVNews and @YourAnonNews), landed and deleted the tweet (users 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 50, 137, 544, 123, @YourAnonNews, @Mediaite, @OccupyWallStNYC, @newscomauHQ and @adland) and apologized (users 305, @PerezHilton, @BBCWorld and @thecrisismag).

In the process of information sharing among Twitter users, traditional media played a significant role, covering the case, increasing its visibility beyond Twitter, and even providing new information that was to the detriment of Sacco. Indeed, by checking the links posted in the tweets, it is visible that several media outlets covered the case: *LA Weekly* (Romero, 2013); *CNN* (Stelter, 2013a), *Buzzfeed* (Vingiano, 2013), *USA Today* (DiBlasio, 2013), *Le Nouvel Obs* (Le Nouvel Obs, 2013), *The New York Times* (Southall, 2013), *BBC News* (BBC News, 2013), *Mashable* (C. Taylor, 2013), *CTV News* (CTVNews, 2013), and *The Daily Mail* (Daily Mail, 2013)—to name a few. Some of these news vehicles also tweeted themselves, and even made it into the network’s most mentioned users list: @CTVNews, @LAWeekly and @BBCWorld.

What is visible in these interactions between Twitter users and traditional media outlets is that the Twitter activity is used as newsworthy material by the outlets, increasing the case’s visibility outside of Twitter. Once published, Twitter users share the coverage to give each other

updates on the case, providing even more visibility to the case and the media outlets; thus, the coverage becomes a topic of discussion in itself. As I will show in the next analysis chapter, media outlets helped constitute Sacco's image as an outsider.

3. Righteous Speech

A second type of conversation, held using the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet, focused on the wrongness of the tweet and Sacco herself, as well as the consequences to be imposed upon her, and other possible responses to address what users perceived as a problem. The central feature of this conversation is, then, users' recognition of the moral wrongness of Sacco and their attempt to find the best response to it. As I defined in Chapter 3, the shamer believes that their defense of a certain value is *righteous*, that is, morally correct, while the wrongdoer engages in vile actions. This section, therefore, explores how this righteousness manifests in three main forms: by condemning Sacco, by justifying the consequences imposed upon her, and by promoting other, better, even more righteous solutions to the case.

3.1. Justine's Wrongdoing and her Total Self

Why did Sacco's tweet provoke such outrage? In this section, I will explore the reaction directed at Sacco and her tweet, that is, why users thought it to be wrong and how they characterized Sacco.

i – Reasons of Outrage

A few users gave explanations on why the AIDS tweet was subjected to such outrage. Firstly, they say, because Sacco collapsed together AIDS, Africa and Black people in general as necessarily linked to each other. @AidforAfrica briefly explained this in a statement shared on Twitter: "Sacco's tweet speaks to a lack of understanding about Africa and AIDS and reinforces an uninformed tendency to link AIDS and Africa whenever one or the other is mentioned" (Aid

for Africa, 2013 - shared by @AidforAfrica). In a similar way, the account @funkybrownchick remembered the “FACT: *Anyone* can ‘get AIDS’” at the same time that it shared a link about AIDS numbers in the USA.

Secondly, users pointed out that Sacco generalized “Africa” when she did not specify which country she was going to: “I love that we have no idea where @JustineSacco is going because ‘Africa.’” (user 185); “How does one fly to Africa? Please tell me? What’s the name of Africa’s airport?” (user 472).

However, the general tendency of Twitter users was to skip any explanations. These were not necessary since “That @JustineSacco is offensive is *obvious*” (user 142). Most users simply classified Sacco and her tweet as something vile, as we will see in the next section.

ii – Justine is...

Needless to say, users characterized Sacco and her tweet in a myriad of depreciative ways. This characterization drew a picture of Sacco that encompassed all aspects of her life including her past, her future, her family, her profession and even her apology. Her tweets (including the one about AIDS and past ones) were classified as *offensive* (users 79 and 371), *idiotic* (users 466 and 394), *stupid* (user 197), *stigmatizing* (@AIDSHealthcare), *tasteless* (users 214 and 215, @TwitchyTeam,), *alarming* (user 25), and an example of *white privilege* (user 197). Sacco herself was also accused of *white privilege* (user 423), besides being called *offensive* (user 142), *ignorant* (users 48, 154 and 162), a *piece of crap* (user 543), *cruel* (user 104), *with no brain cells* (user 47), an *idiot* (user 155), an *asshole* (@assholeofday), a *bigot* (user 157) and an *obnoxious and self-involved jerk* (user 158). Sacco is also characterized as someone who needs “to learn”: users wish her to be sent to an AIDS organization in Africa to do groundwork (user 220); they celebrate the lesson she “(...) GON’LEARN TODAY!” from Twitter (user 199); or

they state her need to evolve (user 219). Finally, of course, both Sacco and her tweet were called *racist* (users 204, 156, 129, 104, 13, 285, 211, 39, 205, 48, 54, 159, 540, @assholeofday, @BananaNewslne, @dailydot, @memeburn, @NetNewsBuzz, @OccupyLA, @OccupyWallStNYC, @Popdust, @SABreakingNews and @VibeMagazine).

This vilified image of Sacco is reinforced by other areas of her life, in which she is also seen as bad. Professionally, Sacco is a bad Public Relations specialist. Users are baffled by how someone with public relations knowledge could publish such a disastrous message: “This woman was in PR? At like an actual company? That paid her?” (user 32); “Irony: @JustineSacco’s LinkedIn lists ‘Crisis Communications’ as an area of expertise” (user 186). Her lack of skill is heightened by the fact that this is a “PR nightmare” (user 34), that is, “The biggest PR disaster and social media moment of 2013” (user 256). Therefore, users classify her actions as “PR idiocy” (user 109) and a PR “blunder” (user 274). This characterization is confirmed when users realize that, despite working with media, Sacco did not own the justinesacco.com domain, which allowed it to be bought and redirected to @AidforAfrica (user 479). With such an apparent lack of PR expertise, user 136 jokes: “Cora: ‘Why are you considering a career in PR?’ Edith: ‘Because apparently they’ll take anyone.’” Moreover, besides being a professional despite apparently lacking expertise, Sacco was also characterized as an unbearable colleague: “Imagine the *relief* all the people who’ve had to *endure* working with @JustineSacco are feeling right now” (user 150).

Likewise, Sacco’s family is also used to demean her. Here, a then-alleged fact plays a special importance: incorrect accusations that Sacco’s father was a South African billionaire who made his money during the apartheid²⁰ (users 47, 423, 147 and 198). Users understood that

²⁰ According to Ronson (2015e), Sacco’s father is not a billionaire but a carpet salesman.

Sacco's father being a billionaire "Explains a lot" (user 198), and it is an example of "White privilege at its finest... NOT" (user 423), as well as of the fact that "money does not buy u brain cells" (user 47). This supposed entitlement and privilege allowed users to dismiss any empathy towards Sacco: "#HasJustineLandedYet on her BILLIONAIRE daddy's pile of Apartheid-era mining money? LMAO [laugh my ass off] at concern trolling about Sacco's *ruined* life" (user 196).

Sacco's father is also used to characterize her as low in another way. User 96, who actually went to the airport to meet Sacco, allegedly spoke to her father once there: "'I'm so incredibly ashamed of her. She's a fucking idiot' – Justine's dad to me" (user 96). Here, Sacco is disparaged by her own family, confirming the condemnation of the users.

Furthermore, Sacco's networks were also scrutinized by Twitter users, who showed her previous posts as proof of her failed character. The *Buzzfeed Community* online publication compiled Sacco's old tweets that could also be considered offensive, such as "As I sit and eat a bagel with lox, i would like to send love to my jews who are all starving themselves right now. #hungryhungryhebrews" and "I had a sex dream about an autistic kid last night. #fml [fuck my life]" (jenvesp, 2013). The link with Sacco's offensive tweets was shared by users 143, 154, 156, 525 and 25. Users demonstrated incredulity ("Just. Wow" – user 154) and alarm ("Yikes" – user 25) with these old tweets. For the users, these old tweets are proof that Sacco is the person who authored the AIDS message since they show her habitual lack of common sense: "If she claims her account was hacked, how does she explain these [old tweets]?" (user 156).

Finally, even Sacco's apology is a confirmation of her low character—both the apology the Twitter users expected and the one that was really issued. Pre-judging a future apology, before Sacco even landed, user 14 predicted a "'sorry you were offended' non-apology".

Similarly, when the fake profile @JustineSacco6 started apologizing on Twitter²¹, that was also not good enough for the tweeters: user 521 criticized it as “Apologizing at the speed of white”. And the same happened when the real apology was issued by the real Sacco: for user 222, her apology “... reaps of white privilege”.

Therefore, Sacco, across several aspects of her life and her actions, is lowered by Twitter users.

iii – ...Racist

The main accusation against Sacco, nonetheless, is that she is racist. As seen above, there are several tweets classifying Sacco as such. As said by user 197: “Never seen perfect amounts of racism,white privilege & stupidity in one single tweet.Impressive”. Users characterized Sacco as an “infamous racist” (@OccupyLA), accused her of “oblivious racist cruelty” (user 104) and “white privilege” (users 197 and 222). Moreover, users attacked critics of the shaming by asking: “how many free racist tweets does a person get before they’re asked to accept responsibility?” (users 211).

Besides the direct accusations of racism, users also related Sacco’s tweet to other situations and actors related to racism. These tweets make a connection between Sacco’s specific act and a more general social situation in which racism is still present—Sacco is not isolated in time and place but is part of a larger problem, demonstrated in other cases. For example, Sacco’s case is compared many times to Trayvon Martin’s murder by George Zimmerman²²: “She’s

²¹ During the development of the case, there was a proliferation of fake profiles for Sacco on Twitter, as well pointed out by user @AdFreak. One of these fake profiles was @JustineSacco6. This profile started apologizing as if it was Sacco herself, and some users believed it: “Justine Sacco is back @JustineSacco6 and crazy apologizing to every single person on Twitter”(user 408). The same happened to user 521, who ended up criticizing the fake apology from the fake Sacco profile.

²² “Martin, a 17-year-old African American, was returning from a convenience store when he was noticed by Zimmerman, a neighbourhood-watch volunteer. Zimmerman contacted the nonemergency line of the Sanford Police Department, mentioned that there had been burglaries in the neighbourhood, and told the dispatcher that he had

officially fired now but don't worry, the #teaparty has a special bank account for people like u. Ask Zimmerman" (user 162); "Going to North America. Hope I don't get shot by George Zimmerman. Just kidding! I'm white" (user 163). The parody format of the latter tweet was repeated by others to connect #HasJustineLandedYet to situations of racism in the US and elsewhere: "Living in America. That means I say whatever I want. Just kidding! I'm not white!" (user 1); "Heading to Florida. Hope I don't get arrested for murder. Just kidding. I'm white!" (user 175); "Going to England. Hope I don't marry a ROYAL. Just kidding. I'm black! Wait..." (user 302). Others are more explicit in placing Sacco's case as part of a larger picture of racism: "Justine Sacco's ignorant racism doesn't surprise me as a black man who's been in SA & the US. She was just too honest" (user 154).

The characterization of Sacco as *racist* is something important to part of the users. They make sure to properly name and characterize Sacco as racist, not as something else. In this way, user 205 said: "I love how media is calling Sacco's tweet 'bizarre', 'idiotic' when the word they should be using is 'racist'". This specific definition of Sacco as racist is intended to have effects on a larger audience beyond Sacco herself: people watching the shaming in general should comprehend the case as wrongdoing because it is racist, and not for other reasons. Indeed, while many users asserted that the lesson from the case was "to think before tweeting" (e.g., @RoomeeTimes) or "speech has consequences" (e.g., user 22), the users worried about

observed 'a real suspicious guy' The dispatcher communicated to Zimmerman that the police did not need him to follow Martin, but Zimmerman, nevertheless, left his vehicle A violent confrontation ensued, and Zimmerman fired his weapon at Martin at close range, killing him. When police arrived, Zimmerman argued that he had been assaulted by Martin, who was unarmed, and fired in self-defense

Martin's death heightened a debate over the persistence of racism in the United States and in particular over the issue of racial profiling. In March 2012 Pres. Barack Obama—the first Black president of the United States—... characterized racial profiling as a reality that most African Americans, including himself, have had to face. Protests continued across the United States in the wake of the Zimmerman verdict [of not guilty] and led to the formation of the prominent Black Lives Matter social movement, which focused on better treatment of African Americans in all facets of American society" (Munro,2025).

classifying Sacco as racist rejected these conclusions and stated that the *real* lesson is not to mind your words, but not to be racist. As said by user 164, the “take away from #HasJustineLandedYet should not be ‘careful what you post’, should probably be ‘wake up and don’t be an ignorant racist’”. The same was said by user 159: “... the lesson here isn’t, ‘don’t say racist things’, but rather, ‘don’t be racist’”.

3.2. Consequences

At the same time that Twitter users classified Sacco and her tweet as wrong and racist, they imposed, commented, joked about and celebrated the consequences suffered by her—consequences that are seen as just, morally correct. Users engage, therefore, in righteous speech when addressing consequences. Users tweeted mainly about the fact that she was fired, became (in)famous, and that this infamy was permanent. Users also made references to physical violence as a response to Sacco.

Her firing is seen positively by the users, who joke about it—at this point, the righteous speech of appreciating Sacco’s dismissal overlaps with the humorous discourse of finding it funny. A few examples (among many): “That awkward moment when the rest of the world knows your career is over before you do” (user 442); “Looking forward to getting back to work after my vacation in Africa. Just kidding. I’m fired!” (user 52). Users also understood it as “Appropriate action by #IAC” (user 540; IAC was the employer). Additionally, this worldwide fame also meant that it was useless for Sacco to delete the tweet—it was everywhere: “That awkward moment when you delete your tweet and soon find out its plastered all over the net and comes up in Google ...” (user 169). The dissemination of Sacco’s tweet, however, was not an automatic consequence of the shaming: it was due to users actively sharing it by links or print screens, which sometimes was done to share information but on other times it was purposely

done to stop Sacco from trying to erase her wrongdoing. Indeed, many users shared a printout or screenshot of Sacco’s tweet, as visible in the compilation below.

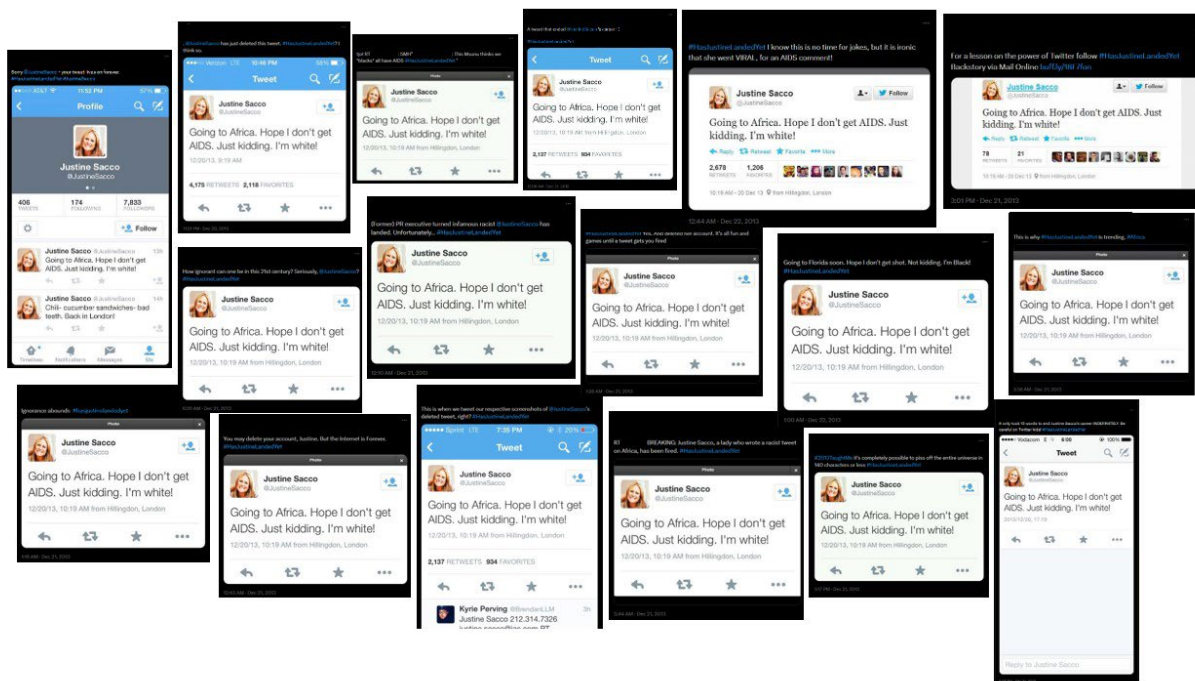


Figure 16: a compilation of tweets that share a printout or screenshot of Sacco’s tweet.

Indeed, many of these tweets sharing Sacco’s tweet are only a comment on the case and are using the printout or screenshot for contextualization. However, sometimes users recognize the permanent nature of these images, and comment on how ineffective Sacco’s decision was to delete her tweet: “Deleting your twitter account is like throwing a huge blanket over the car you just wrecked. Nothing to see here” (user 212); “She deleted it but it’s not going anywhere” (user 213). Yet, this characteristic of permanence is not only recognized but also *weaponized* by the users, who purposely share the print of Sacco’s tweet with the intention of making it lasting and rendering useless the delete: “Sorry @JustineSacco - your tweet lives on forever” (posted by user 181, along with a print of the tweet); “You may delete your account, Justine. But the internet is Forever” (user 126, also posted along with a printout of the tweet); “This is when we tweet our respective screenshots of @JustineSacco’s deleted tweet, right?” (user 134, in a post also

accompanied by a printout of Sacco's tweet). That is, users deliberately share the problematic tweet, making the wrongdoing permanent and impossible to disappear.

Finally, the references of harm and violence: despite the fact that there are no direct threats and no real violence, users open the door to the idea of physical violence to be imposed on Sacco. They entertain themselves by imagining Sacco suffering mob violence (users 538 and 414), being slapped (user 251), stripped and trampled on (user 190), severely cut (user 336), speared (user 410), or stabbed (user 105), besides hoping that "she has and actually gets AIDS" (user 158). Here are two typical examples of tweets referring to violence in Sacco's case:



Figure 17: An imagined angry mob that would "talk" to Sacco on her arrival. Shared by user 538.



Figure 18: An imagined welcome for Sacco in South Africa. Shared by user 410

Figure 17, posted by user 538, shows a crowd of black men with sticks. This picture was originally taken during a miners' strike in South Africa, in September 2012 (Voice of America Português, 2012; Njanji, 2012), but here it looks like an angry mob waiting to beat Sacco. This is humorously presented with the ironic phrase "Yo @JustineSacco6 #WeJustWannaTalk". The other image, Figure 18, which was also taken during a strike in a South African mine in 2012 (Sykora, 2012), portrays one of the miners licking a spear. The tweet humorously says: "Images are starting to surface from outside the airport where @JustineSacco is about to land!" and the image is captioned by the ironic "Welcome to Africa, Justine!" I will analyze these and other

images in more detail in the next chapter. At this point, it suffices to point out the existence of tweets such as these, that do not *textually* or directly incite violence against Sacco but that, at a symbolic level, accept violence as an adequate response to the wrongdoing by Sacco.

Despite the fact that users weaponize the permanence of Sacco's tweet and symbolically accept violence against her, the consequences she suffers are seen as just and the simple result of her speech. There is a perception that her unemployment and infamy are direct consequences from her careless behaviour—from her *speech*: “Freedom of speech does not equate to speech without consequence” (user 22). This idea that speech is free but the speaker must bear the consequences—whatever they are—showed up in many tweets: “Another story that proves the point: Speech, no matter how free, always has consequences” (user 311); “You are free to be careless with your words but be sure you can bear its consequences” (user 229).

Therefore, the global reaction against Sacco, her humiliation and ruined career are seen as just consequences for what she said. There are both a naturalization of consequences, as if they mechanically followed the act, and a lack of reflection on the size of the consequences in proportion to what Sacco had said. In this sense, the consequences are morally correct, righteous, *fair*: it is what Sacco gets for being racist. This mechanization of consequences and the lack of reflection on their proportionality appears in an interesting tweet posted by user 382:

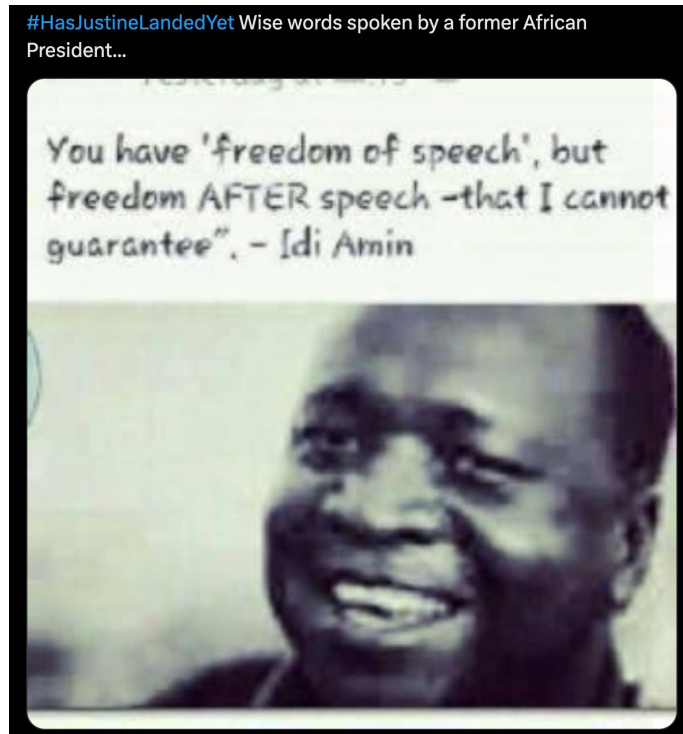


Figure 19: A tweet by user 382 sharing an Idi Amin quote and picture with the comment “Wise words spoken by a former African President...”

Surprisingly, the words of Uganda’s former dictator Idi Amin are characterized as “wise”, and Amin is simply called “a former African President”. A smiley picture of the dictator is attached to the post. It is impossible to know what the user thinks or knows about Idi Amin, but it is highly revealing that a dictator’s words about freedom of speech are used to justify Sacco’s case—in response to what she did, any consequences are possible. This tweet was retweeted 61 times.

3.3. Charity and Self-Promotion

Another common response to the event was to try to make more out of it, extrapolating its object beyond Sacco—to turn something bad into good. Chiefly, this involved creating awareness about AIDS and gathering funds for charity. Interestingly, the “bad” these users are trying to transform is both Sacco’s message and the dog-pile reaction to it. The best example of

this discourse is an incident involving Aid for Africa—an NGO working for Sub-Saharan Africa (Aid for Africa, n.d.)

In fact, during Sacco's shaming, an unidentified person bought the justinesacco.com web domain and redirected it to the Aid for Africa donation webpage (the NGO was not responsible for the redirecting (Aid for Africa, 2013)). Twitter users classified this move as "Well played" (users 106, 107, 108, 109, 407, 115, 116, 541 and 284), deserving "a Nobel prize" (user 117), "savvy" (user 118), "Real-time genius" (user 119), "awesome" (user 120) and brilliant (users 109 and 240). The move, besides being generally admired, brought several different meanings to the shaming. Users saw it as an example of good versus bad PR (user 109) and a way of turning something bad into good (users 9, 207 and 111). Aid for Africa itself, in its official statement about Sacco's tweet, portrayed its action as turning "...a bad situation into something good" (Aid for Africa, 2013). Moreover, the move had an element of fun: the redirection of the justinesacco.com domain to an AIDS charity sounded like an irony with a charitable twist.

It is important to notice that, despite the fact that it was not the NGO who bought and redirected the domain, Aid for Africa accepted the opportunity to bring more attention to its cause, as well as donations. Indeed, the NGO tweeted 23 times using the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet, asking for donations and positioning itself in relation to Sacco's words. All the attention around Aid for Africa was not without results. The NGO became the second most mentioned actor in the network, with mentions by 1,719 unique users, behind only Sacco herself (3,320 mentions) and well ahead of the third most mentioned actor, @kerrywashington (964), which shows the popularity of this theme among Twitter users. Indeed, the redirection of the domain united the humorous and self-righteous aspects of the shaming: it became the perfect way to enforce the values brought up by the case (anti-racism, AIDS awareness) in a mocking

way. The encouragement of charity, moreover, also responded to some user's will to make more out of the case than simply shaming Sacco: Aid for Africa's move turned a bad situation into a good one, something hateful into something hopeful.

Other charities followed suit and re-directed other websites. Users 112 and 113 created the webpage goingtoafrica.neocities.org, full of resources to donate and to learn more about AIDS and Africa. At the top of the webpage, they wrote: "The AIDS epidemic is *bigger* than a tweet from a person in PR. If we want *real change*, we need to think *beyond Justine*. Let's *turn that anger into something tangible*". The authors of the webpage were very clear in their tweets about their intentions of making the case not about Sacco, but about awareness and charity: "Following #hasJustinelandedyet? Why not help make AIDS history *instead*? Give via ..." (user 112); "Please RT *Snark is cheap* and AIDS is real. [User 112] and I made it easy to learn & donate ..." (user 113). The users assert to be looking for better responses than "snark"—even though they used an ironic name to their website that referred to Sacco's tweet and used the hashtag to promote it.

Users also indicated other charities as a better response than attacking Sacco: "It's terrifying how quickly #HasJustineLandedYet turned into a dogpile. Let's practice *purposeful* outrage and donate: [amfAR.org]" (user 114). The company Funky Brown Chick, that helps social causes (Funky Brown Chick, 2019), tweeted a series of good-humoured AIDS awareness messages using the hashtag, such as "What the hell does dental health have to do with #HIV / #AIDS? Gum disease + blood + open skin + blowjob = uh-oh!" and "QUESTION: Can I see a video of a hot dude putting a condom on correctly? ANSWER: Fuck yeah![link to YouTube video about how to put a condom]". Likewise, other AIDS-related charities (AIDS Health Care, ONE, We Care, , Dignitas International), and even official US government initiatives (the US

Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Health and Human Services site AIDS.gov and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS (PEPFAR)), actively used the hashtag to promote their cause: "Saddened by the #HasJustineLandedYet situation, let's make sure to keep raising awareness of HIV/AIDS for everyone" (@WeCare); "Following #HasJustineLandedYet? Take action and donate! We've put nearly 200,000 people on HIV treatment" (@DignitasIntl). That is, Sacco's shaming represented an opportunity for actors related to the underlying cause to bring awareness to their actions and to try to gather more resources. These initiatives were viewed as a better option than the simple shaming of Sacco, even though all of them used at least the comic effect of the hashtag to convey their message.

Twitter users, therefore, engage in conversations about the wrongness of Sacco's tweet; disparage her in all aspects of her life; call out her racism; mock the consequences imposed on her, potentializing some of them; jokingly refer to physical harm; naturalize the consequences and blame Sacco for them; and, try to give the case more impact, bringing awareness and resources to the AIDS cause, promoting the work of actors involved with the cause. The users, then, adhere to a righteous discourse and attitudes towards Sacco's characterization and impose consequences as well as towards the underlying cause.

4. Entertaining Speech: Expectation and Humour

Besides disparaging Sacco and her tweet and commenting on the consequences, users also entertained themselves with the case while waiting for Sacco to land, exchanging jokes among themselves. Sacco's trip to South Africa became a tense TV show episode, for which Twitter users expected a dramatic end, while enjoying the humorous reactions to the case. Three aspects must be explored under this topic: the relationship of the case with entertainment

products, the cliff-hanging quality of the expectation of Sacco’s landing, and the ubiquitous presence of humour in it.

Firstly, the relationship of the case with mass entertainment products. Indeed, users commonly referred to movies and TV shows to make jokes about the situation as, for example, *Will & Grace* (user 39), *The Sopranos* (user 345), *Airplane!* (user 251), *Ghost* (user 85), *Lord of the Rings* (users 73 and 214) and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (user 475). See, for example, one of the most shared jokes in the #HasJustineLandedYet network, a well-known 2001 meme²³, which parodies a line from the movie *The Lord of the Rings*. It highlights the irony of Sacco going to Africa right after offending Africans:

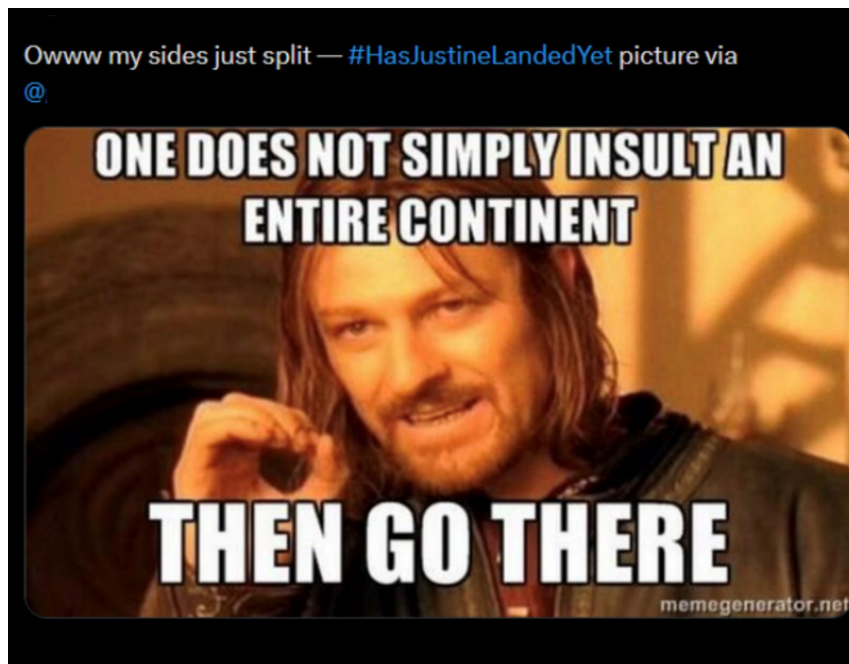


Figure 20: A version of the meme “One does not Simply Walk into Mordor” adapted to Sacco’s case, shared by user 214.

²³ This is an adaptation of the 2001 meme known as “One does not Simply Walk into Mordor”. “The phrase ‘One does not simply walk into Mordor’ originates from a scene in Peter Jackson’s 2001 film adaption of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. In the scene, the Council of Elrond reveals that an evil ring must be destroyed by being thrown into the fires of Mount Doom, a volcano deep in the territory of Mordor. Boromir [the character played by Sean Bean, seen in the image] promptly points out the difficulty of the task by saying, ‘One does not simply walk into Mordor.’” (Blubber, 2009)

Another popular meme that connected Sacco’s case to entertainment industry products was the photoshopped poster of the 2003 movie *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, originally starring Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey:

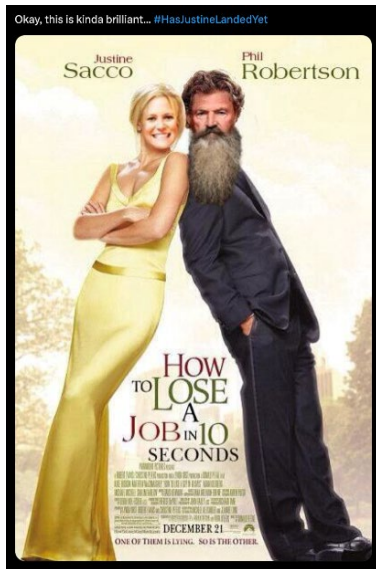


Figure 21: The poster of *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, with Justine Sacco’s and Phil Robertson’s faces photoshopped on the protagonists’ bodies, shared by user 475.

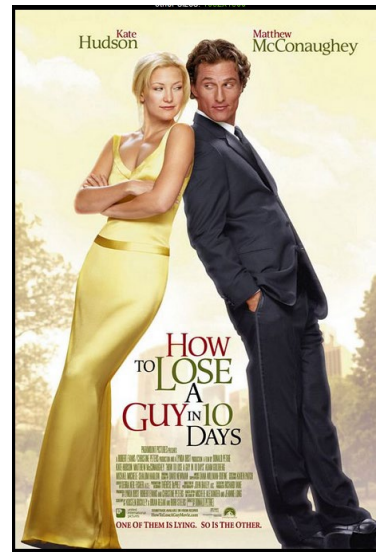


Figure 22: The original poster of the movie *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* (IMP Awards, n.d.)

This meme does a double reference to entertainment: to the movie *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* and to reality TV star Phil Robertson, who was also shamed and suspended from his show the week before Sacco’s flight²⁴. The meme, then, references both Robertson’s case and the *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* movie, changing its title to “How to Lose a Job in Ten Seconds”. As the movie jokes about losing a special relationship quite fast—ten days—the meme jokes on losing one’s job even faster—ten seconds, the time to write a tweet.

Users also made references to songs. User 159 parodied Aerosmith’s 1998 song, “I don’t wanna miss a thing” to say he wanted to stay awake and watch all the shaming’s developments:

²⁴ Indeed, Phil Robertson, also shown in the meme, was a reality TV star on the show *Duck Dynasty*, aired by the A&E channel. The week before Sacco’s cancellation, the network suspended Robertson because of homophobic comments he made to GQ magazine (“Phil Robertson,” 2024).

“It’s my bedtime but. . . ? I don’t wanna close my eyes! I don’t wanna fall asleep, cuz I don’t wanna miss a thiiiing ?”²⁵. User 223, in turn, parodied Jay-Z’s song “99 Problems”: “If your havin’ travel problems, @JustineSacco, I feel bad for ya, son. You got 99 problems, but a job ain’t one”²⁶.

Hence, users made various and many references to movies, TV shows and songs—pop culture references in general—to joke about Sacco. However, the connection between Sacco’s shaming to entertainment is even deeper than the use of these references. Actually, the shaming itself is experienced as an entertainment event. This is noticeable in various comments made by Twitter users.

For example, the fact that Sacco is a PR professional leads to comparisons to another TV show: *Scandal*. The joke is that not even Olivia Pope—the fictional main character of the show, who is the best PR executive in Washington, DC—can clean Sacco’s public relations mess. Users imagine Pope saying: “Gurl, you’re on your own with this one” (user 5). And the joke got more steam after Kerry Washington (@kerrywashington), the actress who played Olivia Pope on the show, retweeted the message. But the connection with the show does not stop there. The expectation of Sacco’s landing was also compared to the show’s tension: “This is more tense than a Scandal episode....” (user 355). Users were waiting for the landing as they waited for a new episode of it: “I’m always jealous of the east coast on Scandal night, but y’all jealous of the West Coast now. #NoSleepTilJustineLands...” (user 121). There is a clear sense of being

²⁵ The original song’s chorus originally is: “Don’t wanna close my eyes / I don’t wanna fall asleep / ‘Cause I’d miss you, babe / And I don’t wanna miss a thing / ‘Cause even when I dream of you (Even when I dream) / The sweetest dream would never do / I’d still miss you, babe / And I don’t wanna miss a thing” Genius, n.d.-a).

²⁶ In the song “99 Problems”, Jay-Z raps: “If you’re having girl problems I feel bad for you son / I got ninety-nine problems but a bitch ain’t one” Genius, n.d.-b).

entertained by watching the vexation of someone, as the users themselves reflect: “This is better than watching a bad driver get pulled over by the cops” (user 194); “Twitter, where you can watch someone ruin their life in real time” (user 317).

This tension was due to the fact that Sacco entered a 12-hour flight after posting her Tweet, creating in the internet users the expectation to know what would happen when she landed—what would her apology be? How would she react when she found out she was fired? Would her phone explode due to the many notifications? They discussed in which airport she would land (user 357), which flight was hers (user 379), how much time there was left to wait (user 64). Users were fully entertained by it: “My money says she’s on BA 43, due in at 7am local time. That’s more than 4 hours away, *so you have time to get snacks...*” (user 185).

The wait was compared to other events that involved high expectations, many of them televised, such as the Wright brothers’ flight (user 85), the Apollo 11 landing (user 270) and Apollo 13 emergency (user 41), the New Year’s ball drop (user 244), and O.J. Simpson’s white Bronco chase (users 300 and 376), making the event a kind of “(...) Santa Tracker for adults” (user 49). Users expected a dramatic confrontation (user 414) and joked that Sacco would have to go back immediately after arriving in South Africa (user 193).

The fact that Sacco did not know what was going on also played a significant role in the internet reaction. The unusualness of the situation—being world infamous and fired without knowing it—was noted: “It is kinda wild to see someone self-destruct without them even being aware of it” (user 257); “(...) sipping orange juice in sky with no clue” (user 138). Sacco’s ignorance created an eagerness to witness the moment when she realized the worldwide hatred towards her. Users anticipated the moment in which Sacco would turn on her phone and it would catch fire (user 437) or explode (user 261) because of the multiple notifications. Comparisons

between the shaming and a surprise party popped up: “I feel like this is the worlds largest surprise party!!!!” (user 428); “Anyone else feel like they're in the dark, crouched behind a sofa, waiting to jump and yell SURPRISE!?” (@YourAnonNews). There is, then, a sensation of festive entertainment and mockery, of something to be watched and waited for, like the next development in an elaborate TV show plot.

The expectation led users to wonder if media would go to the airport (user 414). User 96 actually went there, took a picture of Sacco and allegedly spoke to her father (user 244). When Sacco deleted the tweet, users considered this a lifetime event: “I’ll never forget where I was when Justine deleted the tweet” (user 460). Other users, however, were left frustrated since Sacco’s initial reaction was to simply delete the tweet, without a more dramatic outcome—comparing it, again, to the finale of a TV show: “This is like the season finale of *The Sopranos*. @JustineSacco account went dark and left us all hanging”²⁷ (user 345).

The reference to entertainment, moreover, fits into a larger pattern of amusement in Sacco’s shaming. Indeed, humour and mockery are largely used in the case, having varied (1) objects, (2) types, and, (3) purposes. Its use is so widespread that it is no exaggeration to say that humour is the main language in Sacco’s shaming.

Indeed, this widespread humour has *varied objects*: users mock the fact that British Airways and Sacco do not have in-flight Wi-Fi (“#HasJustineLandedYet has taught me a very important lesson in life: It is always worth it to buy the in-flight WiFi” – user 26); that Sacco lost her job (“Welcome to Cape Town. The temperature is a gorgeous 68 degrees and the skies are as

²⁷ This is a reference to the universally-spoiled final scene of the TV show *The Sopranos*, aired by HBO in 2007. In it, the Italian-American mobster Tony Soprano and his family have dinner in a restaurant under the shadow of a mafia war with another family. Tony Soprano looks at every person coming into the restaurant, probably fearing an attempt against their lives. The restaurant’s front door opens, Tony Soprano looks at it, and the screen goes dark, leaving the show with an unknown final outcome (“Made in America (*The Sopranos*),” 2024).

clear as #JustineSacco’s calendar” – user 146); that Sacco was a bad PR executive (“Cora: “Why are you considering a career in PR?” Edith: “Because apparently they’ll take anyone.”” – user 136); that she has landed (“Justine Sacco tweet time of death: 8:51 PST” – user 544); that the huge internet reaction would flood her phone with notifications (“Justine is gonna turn her phone on and its going to vibrate so hard that it opens up a black hole” – user 457); that Twitter users were waiting for her to land (“‘Twas a quarter ‘til 10, and all through the Net, all of Twitter was asking, #HasJustineLandedYet?” – user 262); and, that Google was providing updates on the flight (“Looks like Google doesn’t want to get left out of the #HasJustineLandedYet meme” – user 98). There were even AIDS jokes (“I know this is no time for jokes, but it is ironic that she went VIRAL, for an AIDS joke” – user 297). Everything in the situation was to be joked about.

Moreover, the reaction assumed different *types* of humor. There was the use of irony (“The @AidforAfrica site crashed due to traffic overload. When it comes back up, consider a donation. Do it for Justine!” – @YourAnonNews); puns (“Justine Sacco just got back on a plane to Antarctica. Said it’s her dream location because it’s ‘white everywhere’” – user 351); rhymes (“Got on the plane, FLAWLESS / Tweeted a joke, TASTELESS / Got off the plane, JOBLESS” – user 215); parodies (“justine #sacco gets police escort as she lands. Just kidding ,she’s F*cked !” – user 187); and, of course, memes:

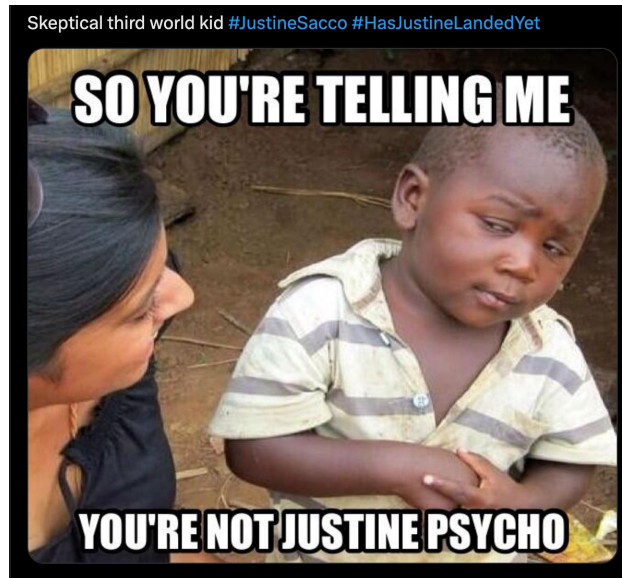


Figure 23: A version of the “Skeptical Third World Kid” meme, adapted to Sacco’s case. Posted by user 282

Finally, humour was used with *various purposes*: to criticize Sacco’s racism (“I love that we have no idea where @JustineSacco is going because ‘Africa.’” – user 185) and lack of expertise (“Irony: @JustineSacco’s LinkedIn lists ‘Crisis Communications’ as an area of expertise” – user 186), as well as to celebrate the consequences imposed on her (“Looking forward to getting back to work after my vacation in Africa. Just kidding. I’m fired!” – user 52). The variety was such that two widely different purposes—encouraging charity and awareness of the AIDS cause and making references of physical violence against Sacco—were both present in the humorous tweets. For example, user 121 used humour to show their approval of the redirection of the justinesacco.com domain to Aid for Africa: “Someone registered [justinesacco.com] and pointed it to an AIDS charity. *Oh, Internet — you complete me*”. The US government and various NGOs used the hashtag to advertise their causes: “We hope you *land* at [www.hiv.gov] today! Visit us to learn about HIV & AIDS basics” (@AIDSGov); “Contribute to our new *JUSTINE fund* to fight for a cure for AIDS ...” (@AIDSPol). On the other hand, users also shared violent images while presenting them in a humorous way:



Figure 24: A violent image shared along with a text containing irony (user 336).

And, to criticize the online reaction, humour was again useful: “This #HasJustineLandedYet thing is like a surprise birthday party where all the guests have chainsaws.” (user 102)

A good example of the variation of purposes in the use of humor were the several parodies that sprouted from the case—a trend in which users would rephrase Sacco’s tweet. They sometimes criticized racism in the US (“Living in America. That means I say whatever I want. Just kidding! I’m not white!” – user 1) or in other places (“Going to the West Bank. Hope I don’t get imprisoned by Israeli soldiers. Just kidding! I’m White” – user 366). It was also used to criticize other forms of prejudice (“Over a lifetime, I’ve developed a sophisticated personal system to avoid rape and sexual assault. J/K! I’m a man” – user 272) or to simply make jokes—even if almost nonsensical: (“I’m going to the Arctic next year. I hope I don’t get mauled by a

polar bear! Just kidding. Polar bears are white” – user 283). There were so many parodies that a user lamented that the parodies were not the trending hashtag at the moment: “The fact that #HasJustineLandedYet is what started trending and not #JustKiddingImWhite is the real tragedy. So much potential” (user 377).

Despite the different types of humour, themes and purposes, all these jokes are made at Sacco’s expense. It does not matter if the tweet is intended to encourage charity or awareness of the AIDS cause, if it is about Sacco landing or polar bears: in the end, the underlying object of the joke is always Sacco. After all, the hashtag that is present in all these tweets is, in itself, a joke: the question “Has Justine landed yet?” It contains humorous irony and expectation, setting the landscape to build more jokes on top of it and to expect her landing as entertainment. This does not mean there are no serious tweets on the topic—there are several users who manifest their outrage, solidarity and criticism—but the hashtag itself invites mockery.

Beyond the righteousness and the information sharing, the shaming also encompasses a lively exchange of humorous jokes and cliff-hanging cultural references. Thus, users also participate to have fun and laugh at the situation. The metaphor of the surprise party is the perfect fit for Sacco’s shaming: together, users comment on Sacco, but they are amused by each other, by their joke exchange and by their ingenious remarks. Therefore, these jokes might be directed at Sacco, or at least made at her expense, but they also intend to reach other users, to entertain them with creative humor—and they do make other users laugh. Indeed, numerous users retweet and reply to these jokes simply by adding a comment such as “LMAO [Laughing My Ass Off]” (user 8); “LOL [Laugh out Loud]” (user 121); “LMFAO [Laughing My Fucking Ass Off]” (user 95); “LMFAOOOOO” (user 2); “*slow clap*” (user 105), “OMG [Oh My God]. Amazing” (user 121); “Haha” (user 19); “Hahaha” (user 44); “Ah ha ha! Best thing I read

all year” (user 427); “Owww my sides just split” (user 214); or, “Simply Hilarious...” (user 441). It is, then, not just about observing Sacco and making fun of her, but also for users to observe users, approving their shared righteousness and sharing jokes. It is not a coincidence, then, that one of the most shared tweets in the network is a joke with a good purpose: “Someone registered [justinesacco.com] and pointed it to an AIDS charity. Oh, Internet — you complete me” (user 121). It is @AidforAfrica’s ingenious, ironic, and purposeful move, which makes fun of Sacco and raises awareness at the same time, that calls the user’s attention. Sacco’s shaming serves as a form of righteous entertainment.

5. Metadiscourse

I have shown in the previous sections that users react to Sacco and her tweet by sharing information, judging her, imposing consequences, being entertained by the case and making jokes about it. In some of the reactions mentioned above, we also see a reaction to the reaction: users talking among themselves about what they are saying. In this way, users dispute how to characterize Sacco (as a racist or something else); they laugh at each other’s jokes; they contribute to a trend of parodies; they compare the case and the wait to a *Scandal* episode; they try to find better responses to a bad situation, and when some of them do, the others congratulate the brilliant move. The communications, then, are as much directed at the users themselves as to Sacco: they reflect and interact with each other.

In this section, I will explore when this reaction to the reaction focuses on the larger picture, when users reflect on the shaming as a whole, taking in its power, its actors and its flaws—when they engage in metadiscourse.

5.1. The power of Twitter: huge, fast and consequential reaction

The first way the shamers reflect on the shaming is in relation to its magnitude: it impresses them. They call it a “A Real-Time Social Media Crisis Case Study” (user 277). For them, it is “Amazing”, how “The biggest PR disaster and social media moment of 2013...” are in “...one tweet” (user 265). Sacco’s shaming is “Fascinating” (user 18), and it will be “legendary” (user 352). The #HasJustineLandedYet trend is “... a lesson on the power of Twitter ...” (user 214). Indeed, it is noticeable that users see Twitter as something powerful and fast, able to change people’s lives and companies in a matter of hours, making them “learn” and face the consequences of their actions.

Twitter is perceived as powerful for several reasons. Firstly, users comment on how the online reaction to something small (a 12-word tweet message) was able to finish Sacco’s career: “A fascinating case study on how one’s career can unravel in just 140 characters” (user 82); “How to get fired in 140 characters or less” (user 208), “What did we learn?- Tweet something racist and the internet will *destroy* your career” (user 54).

Beyond the derailment of Sacco’s career because of a single tweet, users also recognize the massiveness of the responses against Sacco. For them, the case demonstrates that “it’s completely possible to piss off *the entire universe* in 140 characters or less” (user 206). Her destruction is being observed by the whole world: “That awkward moment when *the rest of the world* knows your career is over before you do” (user 442). Jokes are made about how the massive number of notifications on her phone is going to destroy it: the phone is going to catch fire when Sacco turns the Wi-Fi on (user 264):

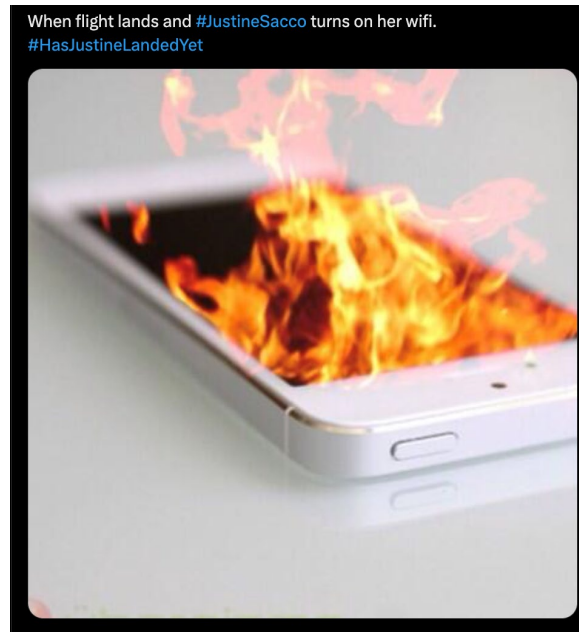


Figure 25: “When flight lands and #JustineSacco turns on her wifi”. Shared by user 264.

And these consequences come fast, the users say. After all, the “internet *waste NO time & shows NO mercy*” (user 525); “Tweet badly, board plane...and ?Fired by *landing time*” (user 157); “Internet processes things *quickly--like faster than your flight*” (user 34). Besides recognizing that it is massive and fast, users also recognize how the consequences go beyond the domains of the social network. They notice how traditional media is reporting it: “What starts on Twitter never stays on Twitter” (user 139, who posted the message along with a link to a *New York Times* story about the case). They also point out how the trend had consequences for IAC, Sacco’s employer: “So the whole #HasJustineLandedYet has cost IAC 2% in shares. *And you say ‘its just Twitter’ Yeah, right*” (user 359).

Expounding on the role the online reaction had on the case, users pointed out that it was the *Twitterverse* that made her dismissal happen: “Looks like *twitterverse just got Justine fired* for her idiotic tweet” (user 466); “*The deed is done. Name scrubbed from company website*” (user 148).

Similarly, her instant fame also caught the attention of the users: “Tweet in haste, repent at leisure. Never truer w/ Justine Sacco. Y’day she had a job. Today she’s infamous & unemployed ...” (user 13); “This woman became famous in a few hours for ALL the wrong reasons!” (user 195). Two facts reinforced the users’ amazement with her instant fame. Firstly, that Sacco became such a topic online that, if someone searched for the term “Justin” on Twitter, her name would show up as the auto-filled first option, even before the name of superstar singer Justin Bieber. Secondly, Google supposedly started showing updates on her flight when a user searched for her name:

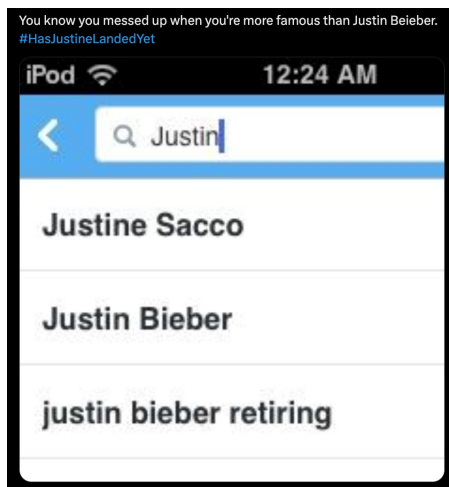


Figure 26: "You know you messed up when you're more famous than Justin Bieber" (shared by user 247). The tweet is accompanied by a screen shot of an online search for the term "Justin", where results return Sacco's name ahead of Justin Bieber's.

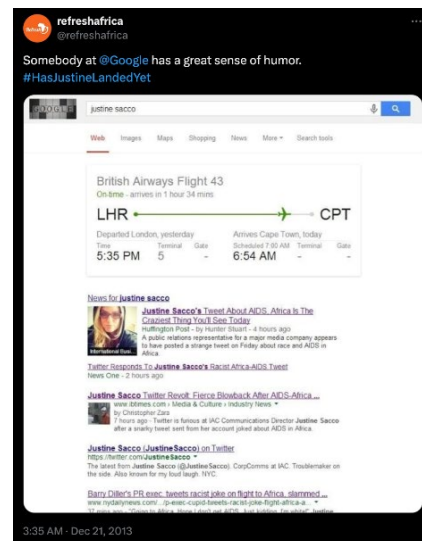


Figure 27: "Somebody at @Google has a great sense of humor" (shared by @refreshafrica). The tweet is accompanied by the Google search results for the term "justine sacco", including an update on her flight.

What is interesting to the users is not only her wrongdoing but also the fact that Twitter got her fired, that she got worldwide infamy, and that the interest in her is so great that it is changing the results of search engines' algorithms.

It is important to notice that users not only understand the consequential power of Twitter, they also think Sacco should have known it too. It was because Sacco did not consider Twitter's power, its potentially life-changing capacities to do harm, and used social media as leisure and amusement, that she ended up in this situation: "It's all fun & games until a tweet gets you fired" (user 154). This leads users to reflect on and fear Twitter's capabilities. Seeing Sacco's example, Twitter users admonish each other to think before tweeting, to not do it "in haste" under the risk of repenting "at leisure" (user 13). The public nature of Twitter posts is in the users' mind: "I always tweet with the understanding that someone somewhere is taking a screenshot. Yup" (user 181); "#HasJustineLandedYet is latest demonstration that Twitter should be treated like a TV mic: Always assume it's on, and people are listening" (user 209). Users alert each other that this "... fiasco should be a lesson to many. Please use your social media spaces with care... People are watching" (user 534).

This harmful potentiality appears in these messages as something that Sacco should have known. These messages blame Sacco—and her lack of foresight—for her own fate. Users classify the case as "career suicide" (users 158 and @Popdust) and self-destruction (user 257). They question: "what did she think would happen?" (user 158). There is a sense of that Sacco brought the harm upon herself, a sense of dismay in the face of such a stupid decision.

5.2. Who is Twitter?

Who is propelling the shaming? Is there a specific group? Users, in their comments, make references to who is shaming Sacco. In this section, I want to highlight not who the shamers really are, but who the users perceive as propelling of the shaming. They point out three groups of actors as potential propellers of the shaming event: Africans, "Black Twitter" and the "the Left".

i – Africans

The participation of Africans was noticeable due to their self-identification and due to references to their potential reactions to Sacco. Indeed, some users referred to their African identity to make fun of Americans: “Going to America. I hope I don’t get DUMB! Only joking. I’m African!” (user 303).

More importantly, users identified Africans as a potential source of antagonism against Sacco. A recurrent joke among users was that “... things are going to get so awkward for #JustineSacco once she realizes Africans have twitter, too” (user 390—similar jokes were made by users 204, 202, 48, 17, 127 and @BananaNewsline). There was also a lot of speculation about what would happen when Sacco arrived in South Africa and, more than once, users imagined an armed crowd waiting for her:



Figure 28: An imagined reception for Sacco in South Africa. Shared by user 414. Similar messages and images were shared by users 190, 410, 538, 77 and 336.

ii – “Black Twitter”

Another group that was identified as leading the shaming against Sacco was “Black Twitter”. Users give the impression that “Black Twitter” is the entity making the decisions on Sacco’s shaming: “She need to pull a Snowden and stay in the Terminal till she negotiates

asylum with Black Twitter” (user 103). The users do not identify who the members of Black Twitter are or how they make decisions. Despite that, Black Twitter was characterized as a real online power that is able to confront Sacco’s racism: “Lesson from #HasJustineLandedYet - black twitter is *real & coming to get* your casual oblivious racist cruelty (user 104).

Some users praised Black Twitter for being able to use irony and humour as weapons against racism: “THE THING ABOUT #BLACKTWITTER & #HasJustineLandedYet is that, we use comedy to deal with the real-life violence of bigotry in our lives” (user 105).

iii - “The Left”

Users also identified the shaming as being propelled by “the Left” of the political spectrum, even though they did not agree on Sacco’s political affiliation or even define what “the Left” is. In this discussion, right-wing users also criticized the shaming as “thought police” and as a performance for white people to feel good about themselves.

For user 200, who shared an article with his analysis of the case, “Lynching” Sacco on Twitter does not make the shamers less racist—the movement against Sacco is just a performance for white people to show how anti-racist they are, and when one proves they are not racist on Twitter, “they can continue to be racist in real life”. User 200, in another tweet, points out how shaming Sacco does not make anyone less racist. In it, an image of a T-shirt says: “I can’t be racist! I lynched Justine Sacco on Twitter!”

Thus, the user critiques the movement, in the sense that they say that acting on Twitter against someone does not mean that the attacker really follows the values defended. User 200, furthermore, understands that the shamers belong to the Left. And, despite the fact that, for these right-wing users, Sacco would also be a Leftist, they write that “... the progressive PC [politically correct] police decided to devour one its own in order to make sure everyone knows

that racism is alive” and that the Left was aiming to punish “thoughtcrimes.” User 252, also referred to the shaming as “#thoughtpolice”, accusing the Left of fascism:

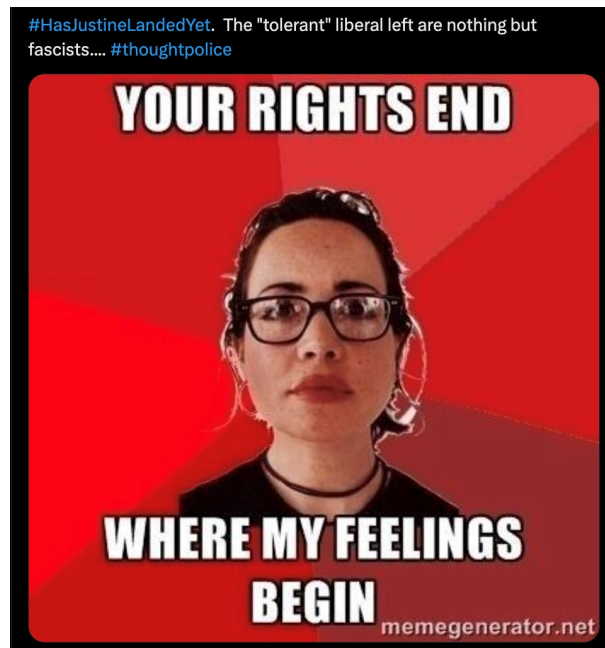


Figure 29: User 252 uses the “Liberal Douche Garofalo” meme to criticize Sacco’s attackers

Another user adds that “George W. Bush did more to help Africa than all of you combined ever will” (user 128).

Other users identified Sacco with the Right, nevertheless. User 162 suggests that the Right will financially help her: “the #teaparty has a special bank account for people like u”. User 170, in turn, jokes that the conservative Fox News will hire Sacco: “Has Fox News signed up Justine Sacco for their next correspondent?”

5.3. The Online Reaction: Good, Bad, or Not Enough?

Users assumed different positions in relation to the shaming. For some, the online reaction to Sacco was correct, being righteous and entertaining. Other condemned the “lynch mob” that was formed, while others were dissatisfied only with the larger societal consequences that the shaming could not bring.

Indeed, some users showed dissatisfaction with the possibilities enabled by the shaming without criticizing the shaming's methods. What these users highlight is that the shaming's possible results are just too narrow to tackle what is perceived as a larger problem. For them, the shaming neither induces real regret from Sacco nor institutional change. User 142, in a series of tweets, asserted that the whole institutional mindset is a bigger problem than Sacco's tweet: "That @JustineSacco is offensive is obvious. *The bigger problem* is that her mindset is no barrier to corporate success". Under this premise, just firing her is not enough: "So, @JustineSacco will probably get fired, if IAC does the usual. But *could we get something more useful to happen?*" The users say that there should be some institutional change at IAC, the employer: "I'm tired of the racist-statement/outrage/contrition/nothing-changes cycle. @IAC_InterActive: *Do something different?*". Likewise, for other users, the shaming is also unable to obtain a true apology from Sacco. They fear that the apology will probably reflect an insufficient acknowledgment of the situation and insincere regret: "Next up, the I'm sorry 'if' I offended anyone speech" (user 221); "So whos predicting a 'sorry you were offended' non-apology?" (user 14). In this way, some users recognize the online reaction as insufficient to deal with the real problem at hand, without criticizing the shaming's methods or the consequences imposed on Sacco.

Nonetheless, another group of users had a more negative opinion about the shaming. They classify the whole story as "... deeply depressing, on so many levels" (user 94). This group of users see the case as communal violence. They call it a lynch mob (users 456, 200 and @TheWrap), a dogpile (user 114), a bloodbath (user 201), "a surprise birthday party where all the guests have chainsaws" (user 102) and they refer to Shirley Jackson's short story "The

Lottery”²⁸ (user 228). In this sense, users shared articles analysing and criticizing the Twitter reaction. In one of the articles, published by *The Wrap* (Waxman, 2013 - shared by @TheWrap), the author says that “destroying Justine Sacco should bother all of us”; that the Twitter lynch mob is “a sport”, disgusting and lacking perspective, and that the “mob” “... makes no moral equivalence between true crimes and careless remarks. The mob just likes to point and jeer and wallow in the fact that someone else gets to be the object of ridicule”. Another article, published by *Mashable* (C. Taylor, 2013 - shared by user 126), condemns Sacco for her words at the same time that it says that the online reaction went too far, referring to insults on Sacco’s Instagram, including insults on pictures of her child. The article also condemns the online reaction for giving Sacco a platform—a loudspeaker to spread her hateful views.

Conversely, many users expressed pleasure and satisfaction with the event. Some users saw the Twitterstorm over Sacco as positive and even defended the online reaction from criticism. User 387 highlighted how “Rare to see a Twitterstorm produce something this useful/positive”, referring to the website created by users 112 and 113 to gather resources and amplify awareness about AIDS in Africa. The online reaction was also defended against a possible sympathy towards Sacco: “Today may be a bad day for @JustineSacco, but when 24 million Africans have HIV/AIDS, remember who has it worse” (user 195); “#HasJustineLandedYet on her BILLIONAIRE daddy’s pile of Apartheid-era mining money? LMAO [laughing my ass off] at concern trolling about Sacco’s *ruined* life” (user 196). Some liked its denunciatory capacities: “THIS is why I love the internet!! Aware of ALL the morons in seconds!” (user 56). Notwithstanding the righteousness of the cause, that is not the only reason

²⁸ “The Lottery” is a short story by Shirley Jackson (1948) published in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1948, in which a small community annually draws one of its inhabitants to be stoned to death in order to bring good luck to the harvest.

why users get so excited about the online response. It is its righteousness combined with its entertaining ingenuity. See, for example, user 84’s appreciation of the unusualness of the situation: “I LOVE twitter ! You board a flight a high flying executive and land jobless and the only one who doesn’t know is you”. This tweet speaks of the surprising nature of the case and of how the world (“everybody”) is watching it. Another tweet, by user 120, comments that “The Twittiverse just keeps get better tonight”, accompanied by video frames shared by user 80, in which Queen Elizabeth II has binoculars and runs to watch a horse race:

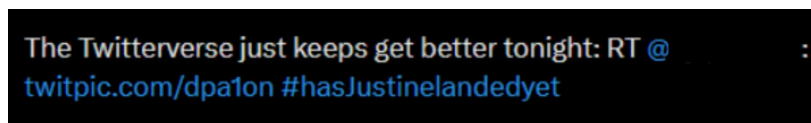


Figure 30: A tweet by user 120 commenting on a small video shared by user 80



Figure 31: Three frames of the small video shared by user 80. The video portrays Queen Elizabeth II running to watch a horse race with binoculars.

The tweet and the accompanying image show that what is good about Twitter that night is watching the whole event. It is not just the righteousness that attracts users, it is following the whole reaction: “People are using #HasJustineLandedYet & are tracking her flight. Thank you Twitter” (user 136).

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how users engage in different conversations around the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet. They vilify Sacco and celebrate the consequences imposed on her; they live in the expectation of her landing as if it was a cliff-hanger episode of a TV show,

exchanging humorous jokes and amusing each other; they also exchange information about the case, keeping each other up to date on it; finally, they reflect about the case itself, sometimes with admiration, at other times with criticism.

From this description, it is also possible to notice that users address Sacco in their tweets, but they also have each other as an audience. The party metaphor, especially considering the amount of amusement users enjoy in using it, makes a lot of sense here: users are talking to each other about a specific topic, exchanging information and jokes, reflecting on the case and about the conversation itself. Moreover, Ng's (2022) characterization of cancel culture as *practices* and primary and secondary *discourses* shows itself to be correct: shamers not only attack the culprit, they also discuss the case among themselves, with various functions.

This self-awareness is noteworthy. It is visible everywhere in the shaming: users dispute the right characterization of Sacco and if this is a dog-pile or deserved consequences; they understand the power of Twitter and its results, and sometimes they even knowingly weaponize the tools available to do so; they observe these results and tools and admonish each other to be careful on Twitter; they criticize the online reaction and try to find better outcomes, or they simply find it amazing. In sum, *they watch each other as much as they watch Sacco*. Witnessing the shaming and participating in it has the same importance as condemning her.

Now that the empirical material has been described and the users' discourses understood, it is possible to get close once again to related shaming to the concepts of crusades and charivaris. The proposed conceptual model, of a dispute of values and principles between online imagined communities that try to extend rules upon each other and use a form of rule enforcement, is very similar to charivaris—the imposition of shame, violence and amusement—and it is tested in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: Online Public Shaming

The theoretical chapters developed how the creation and enforcement of a rule or a value depend on the interested actors gathering means and support to make their perspective prevail in society. Chapter 3 focused on the similarities of shamings and moral crusades in the sense that the former represents a dispute among online imagined communities over values and principles. Chapter 4 presented charivaris as a possible model of rule enforcement in the online shamings' process of deviance creation and as a tool in the dispute of values and rules. Chapter 6 described the empirical material and showed that users interact and watch each other as much as they attack Sacco. This chapter will focus on framing shamings as one strategy that is interested both in punishing and in using rule enforcement within a larger movement of rule creation. The larger movement of rule creation is, in Sacco's case, the anti-racist claims for equality in the United States, represented here by Black Twitter. As rule enforcement, online shamings, like charivaris, are enacted by the community upon the community, using laughter as a basis for organization. By showing how Sacco's shaming advances rule creation and is also a form of rule enforcement, this chapter argues that shamings are a full process of deviance creation.

This chapter is organized into three parts. Preliminarily, it makes explicit which values are being defended in the shaming. Such a step might look obvious at this point, but it is necessary to make clear what is being defended before comprehending the *who* and *how*. At the end of this section, the matter of how Sacco's shaming is located within a process of rule creation will be introduced, showing that the shamers perceive that large parts of American society are racist and that this situation demands change.

After understanding what is at stake, the objective of the second section is to identify *who* is shaming. At this point, the studies of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) and Jenkins (1992) about

elites, grassroots, and interest groups models can be advanced. I will show that *interest* is the determining factor for the participation of the actors in Sacco's shaming. Understanding who is shaming moulds the comprehension of why and how they are shaming. Sacco's shaming is located within a larger, networked, anti-racist fight in the United States, represented by Black Twitter in this case. At this point, the section also addresses how Sacco's shaming uses rule enforcement to advance the objective of rule creation.

As a specific episode, nonetheless, the shaming is a case of rule enforcement, in which Sacco is punished for disrespecting specific values held by the Twitter users. This enforcement possesses several points of intersection with charivaris, while maintaining unique characteristics made possible by mass self-communication. The use of the shaming as rule enforcement and its relations to charivaris are the topic of the third section.

1. Deciding on Values and Rules

Firstly, if this is a case of creation and enforcement of rules and values, which rules and values are these? As a preliminary note, it is necessary to remember that here I am not referring to legal, state rules, but to socially imposed ones. In this way, I use the terms values (abstract principles) and rules (specific commands) as imposed by a social group without the need for state intervention.

That said, as shown in the previous chapter, aside from Aid for Africa's (Aid for Africa, 2013) statement about the case, Twitter users do not waste time explaining what is wrong with Sacco's joke: the obviousness of the offense seems clear to everyone, as stated by user 142, "That @JustineSacco is offensive is obvious." I have also shown that the Left and the Right place Sacco on the opposing sides of the political spectrum (some people accuse her of being a Leftist, others accuse her of being right-wing), although both recognize that this is a shaming

promoted by the Left. Moreover, it is also important to notice that, even though some users criticize the online reaction as “moralizing” (user 200), a “lynch mob” (@TheWrap), or a “bloodbath” (user 201), absolutely no users defended what Sacco tweeted. Actually, even her defenders highlighted that her words deserved reproach: “Sacco, with whom TheWrap has worked on myriad stories with professionalism, *deserved condemnation for the tweet*. But she also deserved a chance to explain herself” (Waxman, 2013 - shared by @TheWrap). In the same way, one of the most vocal critics of the shaming, user 200, despite recognizing that probably “her joke was meant to mock white privilege than to approve it”, classified the tweet as “Pretty tasteless and rather outrageous.” The closest to a defence of her words is user 167’s tweet downplaying it: “We all say dumb things in our drunken stupors sometimes. No need for a lynch mob.” And even in this case, the user is not contending with the values defended in the shaming but only observing that Sacco’s tweet was a mere joke that does not warrant such a massive response. In this way, Sacco’s case is significantly different from Rowling’s. The latter’s tweet about people who menstruate has 82,000 likes; in its replies, several users defend Rowling (e.g., users R17 and R18). Sacco’s case seems to be much more unanimous: there is no disagreement that what she did was, at best, tasteless (users 214 and 215, @TwitchyTeam) and, at worst, a form of racism that evokes Trayvon Martin’s assassination (user 23). What are these values that so unanimously unite the users, therefore?

Three sets of values wronged by Sacco appear in the users’ tweets, well summarized by user 142: “Probably aren’t 10 comedians ever who could land a *white privilege/Africa is a continent not a country/AIDS* joke”—that is, the values offended were racial equality, solidarity towards people living with HIV/AIDS and respect for Africa.

Indeed, a first offense that incited the users' anger was Sacco's unawareness and prejudice in relation to people living with HIV. This is demonstrated by the numerous educational tweets about HIV, such as @funkybrownchick's, user 112's and user 113's website gathering educational and donation resources, and other similar initiatives by individuals and NGOs in the network. Likewise, users defend the shaming by comparing Sacco's suffering to those living with HIV in Africa: "Today may be a bad day for @JustineSacco, but when 24 million Africans have HIV/AIDS, remember who has it worse" (user 195).

Secondly, Sacco offended Africa by generalizing her destination, referring to an entire continent, not a specific country, and for making an automatic link between Africa and HIV/AIDS. In this sense, user 185's tweet ironizes the geographic generalization problem: "I love that we have no idea where @JustineSacco is going because 'Africa.'" In relation to the inadequate association of AIDS with Africa, the NGO Aid for Africa (2013) stated that Sacco's tweet reflected the "uninformed tendency" and "lack of understanding" that led people to automatically associate AIDS with Africa "whenever one or the other is mentioned". Moreover, the users' perception that Sacco had offended Africa was clear in the several jokes about the fact that Africans are also on Twitter and that things would not look good for Sacco once they learned about her joke (for example: users 17, 202, 203 and 204).

Finally, Twitter users perceived Sacco as racist, as seen in the previous chapter. Besides numerous users calling her and her tweet racist, the association of Sacco with racism also becomes clear in the parodies of her tweet that make fun of and criticize other racist situations, such as "Going shopping. Hope I don't get followed by security. Just kidding. I'm white!" (user 176). Twitter users even make it explicit that the shaming is about fighting racism: they talk about exposing a racist (user 178), that Black Twitter is "coming to get your casual oblivious

racist cruelty” (user 104), and that the real lesson of the hashtag is to not be racist (users 153 and 159).

Sacco’s tweet, therefore, was able to offend three different types of values at the same time. Nonetheless, as seen in the previous chapter, users do not take time to explain or discuss these values, making her misdeed plain and dismissing explanations: “How ignorant can one be in this 21st century? *Seriously*, @JustineSacco?” (user 179). The identification of the wrongdoing and its denunciation are, then, part of an implied understanding among users, who do not need to spell it out. As noted by Bouvier (2020), in cancellations, “...issues or objectives may be less clear than a shared sense of outrage and a compelling sense of shared agreement, as well as mobilization around a simple narrative” (Bouvier, 2020, p. 2). In Sacco’s case, what moves the shaming is a mix of outrage, expectation, entertainment and surprise among users, more than an extensive and detailed argumentation of what she did wrong.

2. Who Shames?

The moral crusades chapter explored the classifications of Jenkins (1992) and Goode and Been-Yehuda (1994) of the theories about who is responsible for moral crusades and panics— basically, elites, grassroots and interest groups. In that chapter, I hypothesized that shamings are led by the interaction of grassroots movements with interest groups, without discarding the participation of elites. However, I pointed out that “organization” could mean something very different in a networked environment of mass self-communication: something decentralized, with less obvious leaders and momentary participants.

The empirical data showed itself to be even more complex. The analysis of the tweets showed the presence of a grassroots movement, whose new social media tools make it more organized and able to address its issues without the intermediation of interest groups. That group

is Black Twitter, a network of users mobilized and organized through hashtags. Nonetheless, interest groups are also present, such as NGOs, seeking to advance their moral and economic purposes. Traditional media also participates, bringing visibility to the case inside and outside of Twitter, making Sacco newsworthy and, I argue, helping to construct her image. Economic agents surf the wave to gain visibility using the hashtag. Celebrities gain clicks by sharing jokes, and Twitter gains interactions through mass outrage. What joins all the actors in a single movement is the networked nature of the online space and the use of the hashtag as a tool that centralizes a conversation. The next paragraphs address these various actors and their interests.

2.1. Black Twitter

To identify the shamers, firstly, I observed who the shamers themselves pointed out as participating in the shaming and, secondly, who actively tweeted about the case. As shown in the previous chapter, users in the network point out three groups as responsible for Sacco's shaming: Africans, Black Twitter and the Left. Here, I will be focusing only on Black Twitter for a couple of reasons: firstly, it is the only group of shamers specific enough to be analyzed. The other two groups, "the Left" and "Africans" constitute quite large collectivities who are loosely delimited geographically and in the political spectrum. What part of the Left are we talking about? Democrats? Marxists? Identity activists?²⁹ From where in "Africa" are Sacco's shamers? Is there a specific demographic shaming her? By checking the main users' bios in their profiles, it is possible to see that many declare themselves to be from African countries such as Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, or South Africa. However, as Sacco's critics themselves say, that is

²⁹ As explained by Phelan (2023), "an alliance of far right, conservative, libertarian, and neoliberal identities" use the term "cancel culture" to attack the Left, which, in its turn, "...is so loosely defined that it can potentially incorporate everything from the 'progressive neoliberalism' (Fraser 2017) of the U.S. Democratic Party establishment, the street politics of Antifa, Marxist-Leninist communism, to Ben and Jerry's ice cream. This collapsing of political differences is given a scientific gloss in analyses of 'cancel culture' that treat 'left' and 'liberal' identities as interchangeable (Norris 2021, p. 28)" (p. 6).

quite a large and varied demographic to be considered and analyzed as a single entity. Some sort of refinement would be necessary, and the tweets provide no clue as to what that would be.

Moreover, Black Twitter is not relevant only to Sacco's case, but to cancel culture's practices, origins and even nomenclature (Clark, 2020; Ng, 2022), as seen in the literature review. The study of Black Twitter also clarifies important technical features of Twitter that allow shamings to happen, specifically hashtags and trending topics (S. J. Jackson et al., 2020; Ng, 2022).

Considering this, the argument here is that Sacco's shaming partly happened because of (1) an *already existing* network (2) continuously engaged in activism and shared cultural practices and interactions, (3) organized through hashtags and (4) whose interest in the values offended by Sacco had peaked in the summer of 2013 (which Clark (2020) called "Black Twitter's summer of accountability"—p. 90).

Indeed, users refer to Black Twitter in their messages and give the impression that the subnetwork is the entity making the decisions on Sacco's shaming: "She needs to pull a Snowden and stay in the Terminal till she negotiates asylum with Black Twitter" (user 103). The users do not identify who the members of Black Twitter are or how Black Twitter makes decisions. Despite that, Black Twitter was characterized as a real online power that can confront Sacco's racism: "Lesson from #HasJustineLandedYet - black twitter is *real & coming to get your* casual oblivious racist cruelty" (user 104—emphasis added). This confrontation would not be pleasant, of course: user 20 compared this eventual meet-up to the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*:

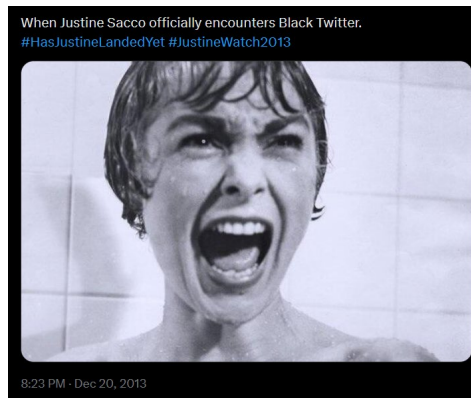


Figure 32: User 20 compares the encounter of Sacco with Black Twitter with the shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho

American Twitter has an over-representation of black adults (Jackson et al., 2020; Pew Research Center, 2024). Florini (2019) explains that Black Americans constitute “Black digital networks.”³⁰ (p. 2-3) which became more visible after protests in Ferguson in 2014, following the death of Mike Brown. Long before then, these Black digital networks were “...how Black Americans have been able to create and use multimedia, transplatform digital networks to articulate their experiences, cultivate community and solidarity, mobilize political resistance, and both bypass and intervene in legacy news media coverage” (p. 2-3). Jackson et al. (2020) also report how, since the killing of Oscar Grant in 2009 and Trayvon Martin in 2012, “...counterpublics, activists, and concerned citizens engaged digital technology in the long tradition of elevating untold stories and unfair conditions faced by African Americans” (p. 118). Furthermore, black Americans also use Twitter to talk about humour and entertainment (Ng, 2022), such as TV shows like *Scandal*, a TV series that was very popular with Black audiences and about which Black Americans used to live-tweet weekly, discussing not only the plot but also the politics of the show (Chatman, 2017).

³⁰ Black Twitter is not the only black digital network existing on the platform. Graham and Smith have studied Black Twitter and Black Conservatives on Twitter (#BCOT) as potential counterpublics (Graham and Smith, 2016, p. 441)

Inside this ecosystem of networks composed of Black Americans, there is “...the related subgroup of the predominantly Black network of Twitter users known as ‘Black Twitter,’” says Florini (2019, p. 19). Black Twitter is “a meta-network, comprised of smaller subnetworks that emerge from interpersonal connections and shared interests” (p. 22). As Chatman (2017) explains,

The use of Twitter by Black Americans for the purposes of collective action and building racial solidarity through sharing ideas and experiences, exchanging jokes, and engaging in the consumption of media texts as a community of invested spectators has resulted in the emergence of what some call “Black Twitter.” Black Twitter manifests as a community constructed through their use of social media and shared communication practices and performative techniques (Brock 2012). Black Twitter is not monolithic; rather, there “are millions of Black users connecting, and engaging with others who have similar concerns, experiences, tastes, and cultural practices” (Florini 2014: 225). (p. 301)

For Florini (2019), Black Twitter has proven itself an important tool for mobilizing the Black community. She exemplifies this claim with Trayvon Martin’s killing in 2012 and the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013: Black Twitter organized to make these events gain national attention, which led to the mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement. As Clark (2020) stated, Black Twitter gained greater prominence in the summer of 2013, in which several cases of racism gained attention, such as celebrity chef Paula Deen’s use of racial slurs. These cases are referenced by the users in the dataset, for example: “Hey Justine, Maybe Paula Deen is looking for a communications director” (user 161). Moreover, the killing of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of Zimmerman in that summer left lasting effects on the network: Jackson et al. (2020) say that the hashtag #TrayvonMartin became a larger “...symbol of the broader condition of racial bias and injustice in America”; they also show “...how the narratives constructed by a particular publics are lasting and how particular stories carry symbolic weight even when events lie in the past” (p. 118-119). When Sacco is shamed in December of that same year, therefore, a network of progressive Black Americans was already organized on Twitter, highly mobilized and active due to extremely sensitive racial issues that

had happened that same year. This network already had the practice of rallying for political and cultural issues by using hashtags such as #TrayvonMartin (Chatman, 2017; Jackson et al., 2020).

Sacco's shaming, thus, is inserted in this much larger context, that of a Black Twitter that had been organizing and mobilizing for years around common cultural practices, humour, and activism, and just a few months after a peak in activity and outrage when public discourse against racism was heightened. This context is evidently reflected in the tweets, which compare her racism to that of Martin's killer: "Going to North America. Hope I don't get shot by George Zimmerman. Just kidding! I'm white" (users 23 and 163). Likewise, users inserted Sacco in the cultural conversations that happen in Black Twitter. It is telling that the most retweeted message on the #HasJustineLandedYet network is a joke referring to the TV show *Scandal*. User 5 tweeted as if the show's main character, Olivia Pope, was talking to Sacco: "Olivia Pope: 'Gurl, you're on your own with this one'." The tweet was then reproduced by actress Kerry Washington, who played Pope in the show, and retweeted 864 times. Sacco's case is, in this way, included in the political and cultural conversations that happened in Black Twitter, including those about racism and privilege in the United States.

Sacco's tweet is, therefore, just one of the examples of racism and privilege among the many others Black Twitter had been addressing throughout the years. It is inside this larger conversation about racism in America that it is possible to understand users' perception of the cultural and political landscape as being hostile to Black people. As stated in the previous section, despite the consensus among users about Sacco's wrongdoing, the tweets make clear that the perception of the users is that racism is all around in American society. They refer to other people or institutions associated with cases of racism, such as Steve Martin (user 169), Aaryn Gries (user 171), Paula Deen, Fox News (users 170 and 171), and George Zimmerman

(users 172, 162, 163, 164, 23, 35 and 173). The numerous parodies illustrate how racism is still present in daily experiences in the US: “Living in America. That means I say whatever I want. Just kidding! I’m not white” (user 1); “Heading to Florida. Hope I don’t get arrested for murder. Just kidding. I’m white!” (user 175); “Going shopping. Hope I don’t get followed by security. Just kidding. I’m white!” (user 176); “Going to America. Hope I don’t get shot by an Islamophobic redneck. Just kidding! I’m brown. Oh wait” (user 177). Users portray a larger context in which there is no equal respect for Black people’s rights. It is a context in which racism is present, and Sacco’s joke is not surprising—“She was just too honest” (user 154).

Sacco, thus, belongs to this other side—the racist side of American society. There is a perceived space, then, in which the values that Black Twitter has been trying to uphold are not enforced. Sacco’s joke happens not as an excrescence in an egalitarian society, but as a manifestation of people and institutions that cannot respect black people as equals. By observing the “Just kidding” parodies, it is visible that this space is perceived as being all around, sown into American society—racism can manifest during a stroll in the shopping mall.

i – Online Public Shamings: Intertwining the Individual and the Political

Sacco’s case represents an individualization of the problem of racism in America. Users enforce on her rules they want to see prevailing in their society. As Lewis and Christin (2022) have shown, this process is an attempt to impose values that is marked by “the subtle blurring of substantive political claims with individualized conflicts and ritualistic performances” (p. 1634). Bouvier (2020) criticizes condensing a political claim into an individualized punishment; for her, in cancellations, racism is depoliticized, individualized and personalized, that is, it becomes the responsibility of a single individual whose attitudes are seen as exceptional instead of inserted in a larger picture of racial inequality. Indeed, in some instances users do characterize Sacco’s

attitude as individual and exceptional, as in user 179's surprise that someone in the twenty-first century could still be racist: "How ignorant can one be in this 21st century? Seriously, @JustineSacco?"

This individualization has important consequences for Sacco, as I will show in the rule enforcement section. However, I argue, differently from Bouvier (2020), there is no contradiction between this individualization with a larger political aim of recognizing the group's values. Actually, shamings work by individualizing the political and politicizing the individual:

Pervasive and structural problems of sexism and racism are discussed in terms of celebrities' actions; the lines between interpersonal drama and political issues are frequently blurred... *interpersonal conflicts serve as broader symbols for ongoing conflicts regarding moral boundaries and political issues on the platform. Thus, political issues tend to become interpersonal, while interpersonal conflicts become political.* While not entirely new, such dynamics are heightened on social media (R. Lewis & Christin, 2022, p. 1649 emphasis added).

In this way, despite the fact that users individualize the racism perceived in the case, they also observe it as an example to the public of what values and rules must be observed: "take away from #HasJustineLandedYet should not be 'careful what you post', should probably be 'wake up and don't be an ignorant racist'" (user 153); "And, to reiterate what [another user] said, the lesson here isn't, 'don't say racist things', but rather, 'don't be racist'" (user 159). Users use creativity and humour to show the intersections of Sacco's case and racism in American society, as in the "just kidding" parodies. They associate Sacco with other individuals also accused of racism; they bring up Zimmerman. In sum, users frame Sacco inside the much larger problem of racism in America, ironizing and ridiculing not only her but this entire racist society.

The case, thus, is not only a way to expose and punish Sacco, but a collective affirmation of a certain group's anti-racist values, and the attempt to ridicule and undermine the opposing social order. There is no rule creation in the sense that shamers do not seek an official legislative

measure to enact a law applicable to the entire nation. However, there is the affirmation of an anti-racist social rule that they want to see extended to the whole society.

Indeed, one cannot assume that all participants in Sacco's network are part of Black Twitter. Users themselves point out that the shaming is a union of white and black Twitter: "Wow, twitter is SO much funnier when white twitter and black twitter *gets together* for a laugh" (user 165). However, Black Twitter is a part of the #HasJustineLandedYet network. Sacco's shaming, at least for some users, did not sprout out of thin air but was part of ongoing anti-racist activism. Furthermore, considering the tragic and violent events against which Black Twitter had been fighting, Sacco's joke gains a different dimension. It was yet another drop in the ocean of racism in the United States. Sacco, therefore, was not simply unlucky to be retweeted by a professional with a large following. Yes, having Sam Biddle as a whistle-blower made it possible for the shaming to start, but it must also be considered that at least a part of her shamers was an organized online network that already had the practice of coordinating action through hashtags (Jackson et al., 2020). For years, Black Twitter had been constructing connections among its users through activism, culture and fandom (Chatman, 2017; Clark, 2020; Florini, 2019; Jackson et al., 2020), allowing it to swiftly act in the face of a new racist offence. Sacco's case, therefore, is not only the enforcement of a rule, but an enforcement inserted in a larger movement for the recognition and extension of anti-racist values.

Remembering Becker's (1963) terminology and description of the natural life of a rule, values are made more concrete by the creation of rules; rules are then applied to specific situations. In here, what is visible is that there is a value (racial equality) held by a group (Black Twitter); this group seeks to expand this value to all of American society in a process of rule creation—that is, the group wants the value to be followed by all, not just by itself. This process

of rule creation has been ongoing for many years, through online and embodied activism. When Sacco tweets, her case is understood by users within this context of rule expansion and it is seen as just another example of how the value is not followed. Black Twitter, then, directly enforces the value upon Sacco, without any specific concretization of the value into a rule. This act represents enforcement, but it is also part of the continued effort of extending the value to all society, serving as a demonstration of how the value is shamefully not followed by some (Sacco) and what should happen in such cases. Rule enforcement, then, is used as a purpose in itself and as an instrument of rule creation.

ii – Black Twitter as a grassroots movement

In terms of the theories of who leads panics and crusades, what is Black Twitter: a grassroots movement or an interest group? As said above and in a previous chapter, Black Twitter is an online manifestation of pre-existing black counterpublics, which assumes a networked organization and mobilization through hashtags. As elaborated by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), a grassroots movement needs not to be the entire society or even a majority: “it could be a minority yet still make up substantial numbers” (p. 55)—which is the case for Black counterpublics: they constitute a section of society that now encounters itself in an online space.

As previously shown, however, grassroots movements need a catalyst to bring their concerns to public attention, that is, “to catapult beyond face-to-face or local constrains”, a role that would be played by interest groups (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 60). But is it so in this case? The networked interactions, the use of hashtags and the visibility of trending topics allowed these grassroots interactions to occupy the public space, without the need for an interest group, that is, “organizational activists [that] provide focus, intensity and direction” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 70). The new media conditions made it possible for grassroots movements

to directly address their concerns, simply by massively tweeting about the same theme, organized through networks and hashtags and made more visible through trending topics. The participation of Black Twitter in Sacco's shaming, therefore, demonstrates how a grassroots movement now has online tools to rally around a cause without the participation of an interest group. In this aspect, the shaming contradicts what was initially expected in this work and also what was theorized by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). The changes in the media environment allowed grassroots movements to independently voice their claims. Tools such as networked communication, hashtags and trending topics opened up space for these counterpublics to manifest and rally for their causes on their own.

To complicate things further, besides a grassroots group able to vocalize their claims without the intervention of interest groups, Sacco's shaming *also attracts interest groups* that interact with the grassroots movement, echoing its moral concerns or taking advantage of them. The next sections address the other actors who participated in Sacco's shaming.

2.2. Non-Governmental Organizations, Governmental Organizations for Social Aid and Social Activists

A first group of actors that also participated in the shaming and are considered interest groups are NGOs, activists and governmental organizations for social aid. Thrall *et al.* (2014) show how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) compete for their audience's attention in the mediatic sphere: "To win the competition for news media attention, NGOs need organizational resources such as money, credibility, technical capability, and close relationships with political elites" (p. 139). Despite the overall optimism in the literature about networked media as a more democratic space that would bring more visibility to the work of NGOs, the authors argue that resources and previous visibility in traditional media are still significant for making an

impression in an environment like Twitter. Having a social media presence is a costly process for human-rights-oriented organizations.

Therefore, taking advantage of the visibility of the trend of Sacco's shaming was (1) topical for the actors who dealt with the HIV/AIDS crisis; and, (2) a good opportunity to gain more visibility in the social media network. Therefore, a series of NGOs, individuals and even American government offices entered the network to try to call attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa and gather funds.

The most important example of the use of the network by NGOs was the case of Aid for Africa. During Sacco's shaming, an unidentified person, not the NGO itself, bought the justinesacco.com web domain and redirected it to the Aid for Africa donation webpage (Aid for Africa, 2013). Twitter users classified this move as "Well played" (e.g., users 115 and 116) and deserving of "a Nobel prize" (user 117). The NGO itself then used the momentum and posted several tweets using the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet and redirecting the users to the mock URL, for example: "Go to [justinesacco.com] and donate to Aid for Africa. A coalition of 80+ orgs helping communities in Africa". The move brought several different meanings to the shaming. Users saw it as an example of good versus bad PR (User 109) and a way of turning something bad into good (Users 9, 110 and 111). Moreover, the move had an element of funniness: the redirection of justinesacco.com to an AIDS charity sounded like an irony with a charitable twist.

Other users also used the hashtag to benefit the AIDS/HIV cause. Users 112 and 113 created a webpage full of resources for donations and to learn more about AIDS/HIV and Africa. The authors of the webpage were very clear in their tweets about their intentions of making the case not about Sacco, but about awareness and charity: "Following #hasJustinelandedyet? Why

not help make AIDS history *instead*? Give via [link for the website]” (user 112); “Please RT *Snark is cheap* and AIDS is real. [User 112] and I made it easy to learn & donate [link for the website]” (user 113). Other users also indicated other charities as a better response than attacking Sacco: “It’s terrifying how quickly #HasJustineLandedYet turned into a dogpile. Let’s practice *purposeful* outrage and donate: [amfAR.org]” (user 114). Likewise, other AIDS-related charities (AIDS Health Care, ONE, We Care, Dignitas International), and even official US government initiatives, like the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US Department of Health and Human Services site AIDS.gov and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS (PEPFAR) actively used the hashtag to promote their causes.

It is important to notice that these are not secondary actors in relation to Black Twitter: Aid for Africa was the second most mentioned actor in the network, being mentioned by 1,719 unique users, behind only Justine Sacco herself, with 3,320 mentions. As said in the previous chapter, the action of the NGOS, activists and governmental agencies for social aid helped galvanize the movement by uniting purposeful righteousness and humour—two of the main sources of energy of the shaming. The general outrage towards Sacco is transformed into organized and purposeful action.

In Becker’s (1963) description of crusaders, there is a differentiation between those actors that act moved by the belief in the content of the rule and those with other, more opportunistic, interests. Where to place these NGOs, activists and governmental agencies as interest groups? Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) help solving this question by noting that it is not paradoxical for an actor to hold both types of interest at once:

Material and ideological/moral gains have traditionally been separated; presumably, they represent two entirely separate motivations. Interest-group politics are usually thought of as cynical, self-serving, devoid of sincere conviction. In real life, such a separation is not always easy to make. Interest-group activists may sincerely believe that their efforts will advance a noble cause... Advancing a moral and ideological cause

almost inevitably entails advancing the status and material interests of the group who expresses or works for them, and advancing the status and material interests of a group or category may simultaneously advance its ideology and morality (p. 67).

One cannot guess these actors' intentions. It is possible, as pointed out by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), that a mix of idealism and opportunism was present. Moreover, whatever the intentions of NGOs, activists and governmental agencies, their response is still supported by the public shaming of Sacco. It uses humorous hashtags and gives more visibility to the case and to Sacco, besides providing another righteous purpose to the shamers: supporting and donating for a good cause, the fight against HIV/AIDS.

2.3. Traditional Media

A second type of interest group that helped the shaming to evolve are the journalists covering the case. Indeed, traditional media vehicles have a complex relationship with social media. Firstly, the former uses the latter for a variety of functions: "In particular, they are using it in four ways: to disseminate news, to market stories, to establish relationships with news consumers, and as a tool for reporting" (Broersma & Graham, 2012, p. 403). Secondly, social media works as a *news source* that informs traditional media vehicles, which either use social media posts to colour an existing story or as a story in itself (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). In this way, social media is a new arena with multiple functions in which the media can act. In other words, it is a new space in which this interest group can "have an independent stake in bringing an issue to the fore, focusing attention on it or transforming the slant of news stories covering it..." (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 67).

As seen in the previous chapter, one of the main discursive functions within the shaming was information sharing among users, who tweeted news links and gave updates on Sacco's situation. In this process of information sharing among Twitter users, traditional media played a

crucial role, covering the case, increasing its visibility outside of Twitter, and even uncovering new information to the detriment of Sacco. Indeed, as said in the previous chapter, checking the links posted in the tweets shows that several media outlets covered the case. Moreover, some news vehicles also tweeted about themselves, distributing the news about the case and becoming some of the social network's most influential actors, with many retweets, for example, @CTVNews, @LAWeekly and @BBCWorld. The popularity of the case attracted traditional media vehicles searching for stories and the resulting publications increased the visibility of the case both inside and outside Twitter. The shaming fed the media, and the media fed the shaming.

However, the traditional media participation did not simply amplify the visibility of the case: that media also helped to form the identity of Sacco as an outsider and to construct the image of the shaming as a powerful instrument that had concrete consequences. The former process was observable in the initial whistle-blowing about Sacco's tweet by journalist Sam Biddle, and in the *Buzzfeed Community* article on the case; the latter, in the *New York Times* piece.

Firstly, Sam Biddle: even before Black Twitter, this journalist was responsible for denouncing Sacco to the world. He retweeted her message to his thousands of followers, blowing the whistle on the wrongdoing. After him, other journalists started to interact with Sacco's profile (Vingiano, 2013). That is, the traditional media actively contributed to Sacco's shaming, with a journalist being the responsible starting it. Notice that Biddle's tweet is not limited to reporting what Sacco had posted: it also explicitly passes judgement on it, ironically saying "And Now, a Funny Holiday Joke from IAC's PR Boss" (Vingiano, 2013). The mix of righteousness and use of outrage to attract readers was made explicit by Biddle himself (2014b) one year after the shaming in a blog post: "outrage is traffic". The interest of the press in following and

“bringing [the] issue to the fore” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 67) starts the shaming: it is not only a matter of reporting it *post facto*. Biddle’s participation also shows that this interest and coverage go beyond simply reporting on the shaming: it helps to constitute the righteousness and outrage of the shaming, offering judgment on Sacco.

The constitution of Sacco’s character as being spoiled is furthered by the *Buzzfeed Community* piece. The article “16 tweets Justine Sacco regrets” compiled Sacco’s other old tweets that could also be considered offensive. As seen in earlier chapters, users expressed incredulity (“Just. Wow” - user 128) and alarm (“Yikes”—user 24) in response to these old tweets. For the users, these old tweets were proof that Sacco was the person who authored the AIDS message since they showed her habitual lack of common sense: “If she claims her account was hacked, how does she explain these [old tweets]?” (user 149). The old tweets help to confirm an idea of Sacco as someone low. Notice that the piece by the *Buzzfeed Community* is not written by professional journalists but by the audience of *Buzzfeed*, who can construct their own news pieces through the website. This sort of interaction combines even more traditional media coverage with social media interaction, directly transforming users’ activities into newsworthy material.

The press also constitutes the image the shamers have of the shaming. The first tweet in the network about the *New York Times* piece about Sacco’s shaming is “PR nightmare on @nytimes ([NYTimes link]) sipping orange juice in the sky with no clue” (user 138), followed by “What starts on Twitter never stays on Twitter #HasJustineLandedYet [NYTimes link]” (user 139). In both comments, the users share the *New York Times* piece to give dimension to the shaming: Sacco is flying without having a clue that she is now featured in the *New York Times*; her shaming is bigger than Twitter. It is visible, then, that the *Times* piece did work not only by

making Sacco's case visible; the piece itself became a topic of discussion. Being featured in the *Times* shows the size of the case and its reach.

It is important to highlight how this reporting happens as the shaming is speeding up, as can be seen in the following graph:

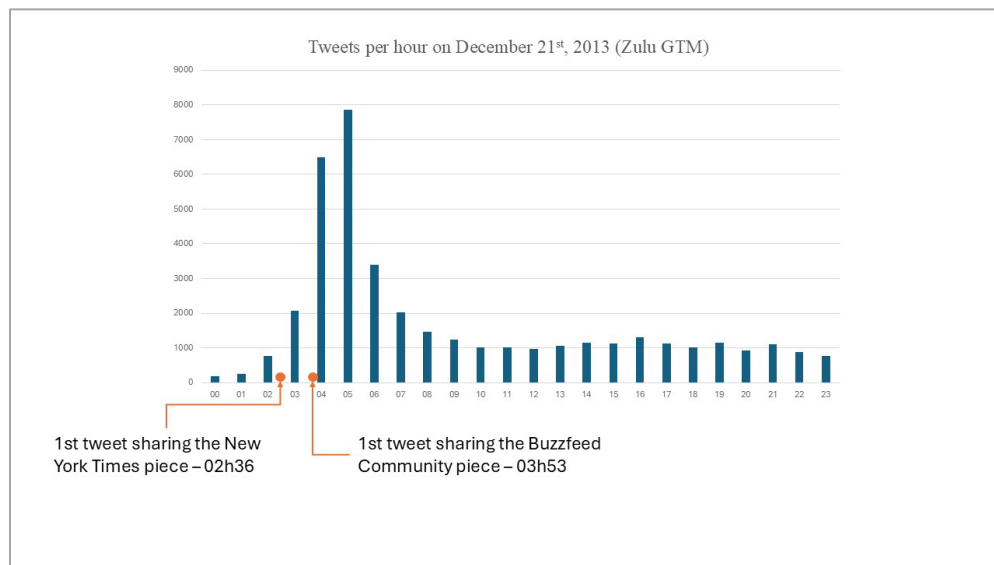


Figure 33: Graph showing the tweets per hour using the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet on December 21, 2013. The orange dots show the approximate time the New York Times and BuzzFeed Community pieces were first tweeted by the users.

The participation of these media vehicles, therefore, is not something that is merely the reporting of an event that has already happened and finished. The traditional press had been present in the shaming from its beginning, making it visible beyond and within Twitter. The traditional press, nonetheless, also actively moulded Sacco's image and the perception users had of the shaming.

2.4. For-Profit Companies

Firstly, GoGo, an in-flight internet provider, announced its product making fun of Sacco. Even though Gogo later apologized for the tweet (Vingiano, 2013), it had impact: Twitter user 141 congratulated the company for its savvy ad:



Figure 34: User 141 congratulates GoGo for its ad.

Furthermore, the communication company Empire Avenue promoted itself via the hashtag. It is interesting to notice that the company’s first tweet with the hashtag was actually dismissing the event’s: “So is #HasJustineLandedYet still a global TT? Sorry we can’t spend more time following the story, but we’re too busy with work.” This tweet did not make it into the most mentioned list—it had only one retweet and no replies. A few minutes later, the company tweeted again, now trying to capitalize on the trend: “You can invest in our virtual stock @ [link] if you think we’ll perform better than Justine”. This tweet performed much better, with 64 retweets. The next day, the company asked its followers which web domain it should redirect to a charity—like what was done by Aid for Africa. The company announced that “justPRsacco” was the winning suggestion and redirected it to the charity Concern Worldwide.

What is visible in these examples are companies using the hashtag to stimulate business—to announce certain products. Thus, actors used the Sacco story to increase their

visibility in the network and advertise their products and goals—either charitable or profitable ones.

Finally, the hashtag was also used in spam messages, inviting other users to “boost” their followers by clicking on attached links. These spam messages included not only the #HasJustineLandedYet hashtag but also others that were popular at the moment, like #2013TaughtMe and #ScottPilgrim. The presence of this sort of account in the network has been noticed by Jackson et al. (2020), when describing the online activism in Trayvon Martin’s case: “... the [Zimmerman] trial network also includes bots and other opportunistic accounts that exploited public interest in the trial to make money or promote products” (p. 110).

These examples show companies using the hashtag to promote business. These, actors used the Sacco story to increase their visibility in the network and advertise their products and goals. Here, we see other interest groups interacting with the case to profit from it. As described by Becker (1963), actors with no moral interest in the rule might participate in its creation or enforcement, moved by other objectives—financial, in this case. The next actor highlighted here is also concerned with both potential financial and reputational costs.

2.5. Sacco’s Employer

To Saint-Louis (2021), the active element that differentiates “cancel culture” from other forms of online abuse is the *act of cancellation*, which, for that author, is when “...an event where organizations censor, fire, or encourage celebrities or commoners to resign following a breach of social norms, mores, and taboos” (p. 4-5). It is undeniable that employers and business partners play a significant role in shamings, in the sense that they might impose financial consequences upon the shamed.

In Sacco's case, there were no tweets actively asking for her to be fired—but there were tweets assuming she would be. The first tweet about that assumption was on December 21 at 02:54Z, by user 142: “So, @JustineSacco will probably get fired, if IAC does the usual.” One minute later, user 150 talked about “career suicide.” Similar others followed; it was only at 04:56Z that the first tweet appeared informing users that IAC had removed Sacco from their “contact us” page (user 127). It was after that user 145 celebrated saying that “The deed is done.”

Users assumed, therefore, even before any word by IAC, that Sacco would be fired—and they ended up being right. With the massive response to Sacco's tweet, the pressure on IAC unsurprisingly had an effect, as is visible in the company's statement: “‘The offensive comment does not reflect the views and values of IAC. We take this issue very seriously, and we have parted ways with the employee in question,’ an IAC spokesman said in a statement” (Stelter, 2013a). It is interesting, then, that IAC reactively participated in the shaming by firing Sacco—the *risk* to the company's reputation was too high if Sacco was thought to reflect IAC's views and values. It is also noticeable that the company, in its statement, did not engage in the demeaning of Sacco, limiting itself to condemning the tweet. To a certain extent, the company gives nuance to Sacco's character, framing her as someone “otherwise known to be a decent person at the core” (Stelter, 2013a). However, this decency was not sufficient to save Sacco's job in the face of the potential reputational damage to IAC of being associated with an executive who is infamous for breaching social norms. The risk mitigation interest prevailed; IAC's participation, therefore, was essential by imposing an important consequence on Sacco.

IAC was similar to the previous companies that tried to obtain financial gains from Sacco's case because IAC also has a monetary interest in Sacco's case—but the interest was in not losing money by managing risk. IAC's role in the shaming, however, is different from that of

other interest groups—IAC is the actor that is finally responsible for enforcing the rule by firing Sacco.

When IAC condemns the joke while firing Sacco, the importance of the values upheld in the shaming is recognized by an actor who can enforce a response to the wrongdoing. The clamour of the movement receives a positive and concrete response. There are similarities here to what Gusfield (1963) explains about the official recognition of crusaders' values through the enactment of legislation—it is a symbol of the importance of these values, of what should prevail in society, and of those who rallied for it. When it manages risk to its own reputation by firing Sacco, IAC puts the final nail in the coffin, signalling that what Sacco did was wrong.

2.6. Twitter

Another actor that must be highlighted as interested in the shaming is Twitter itself. Indeed, the company has an interest in all the clicks, interactions, visualizations and traffic in general on its website.

When it comes to Twitter, the participation and influence of the platform in Sacco's shaming is complex and, above all, difficult to isolate from the actions of the social media users themselves. For some authors, the power and influence of social media platforms is so great that little agency would be left to users. Fuchs (2014), for example, understands that even though the internet has the potential to become a participatory democracy, today it is colonized by corporate interests that can largely determine what is visible online, so the companies giving consumers a technical possibility of reciprocating does not mean real participation. In this perspective, the shaming of Sacco would be a product designed by Twitter, not an event fueled by the social media users' anger and amusement.

However, I understand that Fuchs' pessimistic techno-determinism should give space to a more nuanced and complex understanding of Twitter's interests and design and how it affects and interacts with social media users' actions.

On the one hand, Jackson, Bailey and Welles (2020) have shown how the hashtag—a central tool in Sacco's shaming—has been created and applied by social media users *in interaction* with Twitter's design. The pound sign (#) had already been used in online forums for many years when it was introduced on Twitter by social media user Chris Messina, spreading rapidly on the platform and beyond it. It became “the default method to designate collective thoughts, ideas, arguments, and experiences that might otherwise stand alone or be quickly subsumed within the fast-paced pastiche of Twitter” (p. xxviii). Moreover, it enabled a form of collective storytelling and a horizontal form of online political participation. Hashtags are, then, an online tool designed and formulated by users, helping them to organize.

On the other hand, *trending topics* are an innovation brought by Twitter the company that also affects users' interactions. Ng (2022) has shown that the use of trending topics enabled discussion within online Black counterpublics to reach beyond that sphere, reaching a broader public. In this way, trending topics create a form of visibility that bypasses user-to-user connectivity. Indeed, instead of information having to be passed within users' own networks and being limited by that, the exhibition of a hashtag in the Twitter trending topics allows for it to be known by the whole Twitter public. This is also important in Sacco's case, since she became a trending topic herself. Here, a tool designed by the platform (trending topic) interacts with a tool designed and used by the social media user (hashtag).

Therefore, Twitter's interest in having more interactions and traffic on the platform influenced the visibility that Sacco's case had. Research has shown that “Anger-driven content

has a significant influence on engagement and discourse on social media platforms, particularly Twitter” (Wu et al., 2025, p. 1). Furthermore, trending topics are not defined solely based on the absolute numbers of tweets, but on algorithms “tailored for you based on who you follow, your interests, and your location” (X, n.d.-d). Making Sacco’s downfall—and all the outrage it accompanies— visible on the trending topics is in the interest of the platform and made possible by its algorithm.

It is important to remember, nonetheless, that these are *interactions* that include both Twitter and its users. Twitter created neither hashtags in general nor #HasJustineLandedYet in particular, but it did make this hashtag more visible through its trending topics feature. This process exemplifies well what Leonardi (2012) has observed about the constructivist approach to technology: its development and use are processes full of negotiation, persuasion, and compromise. In this way, in Twitter’s search for more online interactions and financial gains it influences its users and what they see, but users also have an effect on the platform and on its tools.

My point is that it is important to highlight Twitter’s role in Sacco’s shaming, but not to understand it as being deterministic, as if Twitter were the sole party responsible for it. In fact, it is the interaction of the platform’s interest with that of other actors—Black Twitter, NGOs, for-profit companies, journalists, celebrities, etc.— that forms the phenomenon. The shaming is not the expression of a single actor, but of a multitude of them, interacting in complex ways, all according to their own interests, using the tools and designs available.

2.7. Interest as Determinant of Who Shames

Sacco’s shaming attracted several different actors with different interests. Here, I highlighted *just a few* of them: counterpublics interested in changing the debate and the rules of

the public sphere; non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations and activists trying to raise funds and increase awareness about the HIV/AIDS cause; traditional media using the case as news and giving it more visibility; for-profit companies trying to advertise their products; Sacco's employer responding to the risk to its reputation; and, Twitter trying to increase interactions on the platform. Other actors, such as celebrities and influencers looking for visibility, were not highlighted but must also be included in the shaming network as relevant actors. Each of these actors had their reasons for joining the shaming, and their participation gave more visibility to and furthered Sacco's case, keeping the hashtag in the trending topics and bringing consequences to Sacco. From this analysis, a few conclusions may be drawn.

Firstly, Trottier (2018) was right in pointing out that shamings are a phenomenon composed of "an essentially limitless range of other phenomena (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 608). It is important to highlight, however, that unlike Trottier, I do not assume that the State and the traditional media are the leading actors in a shaming, or that the State's presence is necessary. In Sacco's case, for example, the state presence is negligible and secondary, and the shaming does not aim at enhancing an official punishment. So, even though the idea of a "limitless range of other phenomena" is attractive, it would be inadequate to classify a shaming as an *assemblage*, considering the connection of that concept with the State form.

The findings here go beyond Trottier, therefore, showing a more flexible shaming in which grassroots movements might be leaders, and the State's participation might be negligible. Moreover, it is possible now to establish that anyone with an interest in the shaming is a potential participant. As pointed out by Becker (1963), rule creators and enforcers are entrepreneurs with an *interest* in the process of creating deviance. With the advent of mass self-communication, many different actors can now publicize their interests and advocate for them in complex ways,

such as through networked counterpublics, broadcast media, or individual tweeting. This new access to resources and communicational power allows more actors to advocate for what they want.

Secondly, the literature review did not predict the participation of NGOs, government organizations, and AIDS/HIV activists in the shaming. However, considering the case and the visibility gained by these actors through the use of the hashtag, their participation is hardly surprising: using the shaming to publicize their projects, raise funds, and increase awareness advanced the interests of the NGOs and activists. Similarly, it was in the media's interest to cover the case, as well as for Black Twitter to bring up their grievances, for for-profit companies to advertise their products, and for IAC to protect its reputation. Instead of listing participants of shamings, it is better to understand that *a shaming is a deviance-creation process open to whoever is interested in it*. In some cases, as explained by Becker (1963), these actors—like Black Twitter—will believe in the content of the rule. In other cases, the actors gain something from the rule creation and enforcement. In Sacco's case, actors such as the media, celebrities, for-profit companies, Twitter, NGOs, government organizations, and activists gained visibility while shaming Sacco—independently of their belief in the underlying cause. In this sense, scholars should be attentive to unusual and previously unnoticed actors participating in shamings, actors who may advocate for numerous causes and in numerous ways, depending on the interests at play.

In this way, it is also necessary to understand the *interest* of the actors in the sense borrowed from Becker (1963). Shamings will involve not only the express interest in shaming the person and enforcing a rule upon them, but also the interest in participating and, in this way, gaining something with it: visibility, funds, sales, reputation. Thus, the shaming is deepened as

much by those who actively reprehend what the shamed person did as by others who do not necessarily reprehend the wrongdoing but nonetheless have a related interest in the cause.

Shamings, therefore, must be understood as a social phenomenon for creating a deviant through their public shaming, which can attract different actors with different objectives—some more righteous and others more opportunistic.

The dichotomy between material and moral interests, nonetheless, is not absolute: the same actor, as is the case of NGOs, might aim both to protect the cherished values and to gain resources through the shaming. Furthermore, considering the functioning of social media, researchers should pay attention to this potential ambivalence in relation to all actors present, including grassroots movements. Indeed, social media stimulates seeing and being seen, gathering likes and retweets. In this way, potentially every user could be interested in not only the morals of the shaming but also in increasing their own popularity in the network.

Finally, the shaming of Sacco shows a complex interaction between multiple groups that complicates what is expected, according to the literature, in the relationship between grassroots movements and interest groups. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) predicted that "...the grassroots provides the fuel or raw material for a moral panic; organizational activists provide focus, intensity and direction" (p. 70). Nonetheless, in Sacco's case, a journalist blows the whistle, and from the beginning, the press circulates the topic, drawing news from it and moulding Sacco's image. Black Twitter, in turn, utilizes new organizational tools (hashtags and trending topics) to allow its concerns to extend beyond face-to-face conversations and gain public attention. NGOs, activists, and even governmental organizations join in, giving the case a clear and tangible moral objective, while they gather resources, much like for-profit companies.

Interest groups and grassroots organizations interact in complex ways, but together they contribute to the shaming snowball. The pursuit of different interests—moral or material—unites the actors in shaming Sacco.

3. Shamings as Rule Enforcement

The previous section focused on *who* is shaming and showed how shamings are part of a larger process of rule creation. The following paragraphs turn to the matter of the phenomenon as rule enforcement and *how*, and in which ways, the shaming is a full circle in a process of deviance creation. As it will be shown, besides being part of a larger project of rule creation, through which groups try to extend anti-racism to the entire American society, the shaming is used as rule enforcement. As rule enforcement, the shaming assumes a very particular shape, of an extra-legal form of punishment that aims at regulating not only a single individual but society in general; it combines shame and humour, enforcing rules through ridicule. In these ways, online shamings echo charivaris and their carnivalesque derisory practices. Online shamings, nonetheless, have unique features: besides their lack of local context, they are imposed by people unfamiliar with the shamed, via networked action; they prohibit a behaviour as well as encourage positive action; they aim at actions that are not necessarily secret and that, instead, gain global visibility, destroying anonymity; and, they are the result of ephemeral actions but with permanent consequences.

3.1. Participation and Spectacle for the Crowd

Arguably, the most important similarity between online shamings and charivaris is their processes of mocking and humiliation as public spectacles of led by, and for the entertainment of, the crowd.

Charivaris aimed at regulating behaviour by producing a collective festivity in which the privacy of the culprit was destroyed: their flaws and mistakes were brought to the eyes of the community. The shaming of the charivaried person ensued, and perhaps their exclusion. All this process was organized through mocking laughter, that, as shown by Davis (1971), challenged the official order at the same time that it helped maintain the community's values and integrity. The shaming of Sacco works very similarly, but with the idiosyncrasies brought by mass self-communication.

i – Shaming

In Chapter 4, about charivaris, I showed that shame was omnipresent in that type of ritual. Shaming was the main tool used by charivariers to punish the culprit (Greenhill 2010; Nash and Kilday 2010; Favretto 2015; Thompson 1993; Macedo 2005; Dobash and Dobash 1981; Greer 1990; Frank 1987). Through shaming, the whole person is attacked and exposed as someone who did not attain certain ideals (Piers 1971; Morrison 1983; Martha Craven Nussbaum 2004; Trottier 2018), and the culprit's social bond is threatened (Scheff 1997; 2000; Piers 1971). Charivaris imposed shame by exposing the flaws of the culprit to the eyes of others by contextualizing the person as someone who is *essentially flawed*; by using practices of ridicule and derision; and, finally, by expelling the culprit from the community, transforming the threat to the social bond into a reality.

The imposition of shame is also essential in Sacco's case. As shown in the previous chapter, the users express disapproval of Sacco's tweet and of Sacco herself, in a characterization of Sacco that encompasses her entire self: her past, present and future are portrayed as flawed. Indeed, as Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) write, in shamings, "The moral impugning of character ... typically involves descriptions of a person as *sullied and tainted*, rather than stating

facts or arguments concerning her views or behaviour. They are framed as someone *beyond the pale, not to be trusted or engaged with*" (pp. 5-6, my emphasis). Sacco's wrong-doing (the tweet) is identified and she is tainted not only as someone who said something racist, but as being a racist—and she is shamed accordingly: she is called an "idiot" (user 142), a "piece of crap" (user 136), brainless (user 154), an "asshole" (user 156), an "ignorant fool" (user 152), an "obnoxious, self-involved jerk" (user 158), a racist (user 205), an "ignorant racist" (user 153). Sacco is one of those untrustworthy outsiders referred to by Becker: she does not live by the group's rules—she needs to learn them. Indeed, user 219 says that "those that still believe that the darker your skin, the less intelligent you are *have quite some evolving to do*"; user 199 celebrates that "I see the twitterverse has struck again. *YOU GON' LEARN TODAY*". We see, by these tweets, that the shaming is not just about Sacco's specific wrongdoing—the tweet—it spreads into a judgment of her as a person, of who she essentially is. And users, through calling Sacco names and cursing at her, impose this shameful persona upon her.

This characterization is confirmed and reinforced by the widely shared *Buzzfeed Community* (2013) piece about the case, which compiled Sacco's old tweets that could also be considered offensive. These past tweets by Sacco add up to construction Sacco's persona for the shaming since they prove that the AIDS tweet was not an exception but just an example of Sacco's behaviour—the behaviour of a person who lacks basic common sense and spreads prejudice: "This woman was in PR? At like an actual company? That paid her?" (user 32). To them, Sacco is this idiotic racist person in her entirety—Sacco as a whole is flawed, not only her tweet. Even her future confirms it. Before she landed, users bet that her apology would be equally racist: "Next up, the I'm sorry 'if' I offended anyone speech" (user 221). And when the apology finally comes, it only confirms her racist nature since it "...reaps of white privilege"

(user 222). Therefore, the user's evaluation of her morally condemnable motivations appears to them to be accurate. Any apologies by the shamed or claims that the racist behaviour was out-of-character are considered inauthentic.

This characterization of Sacco as essentially flawed is made possible due to the lack of context in which her online story was built. Charivaris happened in a specific local context, in which the animosity between the charivaried person and the crowd had been simmering for some time before the punishment took place., being fueled not by a single offence, but by a history of dislike within the community. This is the contrary of what happens in Sacco's case, where there is a meagre amount of information about her available to the shamers. In fact, the network's information about Sacco can be summarized as: (1) Sacco tweeted the AIDS tweet; (2) she works for IAC; (3) she is flying to South Africa; (4) her father is a South-African billionaire (which, as it turned out, is untrue); and, (5) she has published other problematic tweets. Not much more is known about Sacco to the shamers, and part of what is known to them is either false or collected after her shaming started. This shows that, unlike charivaris, Sacco's shaming works with a single, out-of-context offence. In this way, the shaming is led by actors who only know the shamed via the visible aspects of the wrongdoing and superficial facts about the person—which does not stop the shamers from evaluating and judging the entirety of the shamed person herself.

Since the shamers do not know Sacco on a deeper level of other roles of her life and within the community, it is easier for them to make her into a unidimensional character who is reduced to her tweet. She is typed as privileged, stupid, idiotic, ignorant, and racist. As observed by Bouvier (2020) in relation to other cancellations, the shamed "... is a *type* that they have come across before. The typology: 'aggressive, disrespectful, ignorant, bigoted' women" (p. 5,

emphasis added) For them, she is just one case among others in a racist society. With the lack of context and by being typed, Sacco is inserted in a simple narrative of good versus evil in which she represents the opposite of the shamer's morality:

Such fictionalization is endemic to shaming. Because shaming targets the whole person, rather than a specific act, it favors the flatness of stereotype over the complexity of the real. It is comforting to believe that we can easily sort the people we encounter online into good and bad, allies and enemies, human and subhuman. Online shaming expresses the fantasy of a simple moral world (Tyson, 2022, p. 129).

Indeed, this event, of being typed as racist is compared to the actions of a countertype: awareness and charity. Twitter users are invited to donate and "... turn a *hateful* tweet into *hopeful* action" (@DignitasIntl); they celebrate "...@AidforAfrica for turning a *bad* situation into a *positive* one" (user 207) when acquiring the justinesacco.com domain. The move is called "*brilliant*" while Sacco represents "*idiocy*" (user 109). Sacco is also called an "*idiot*", while @funkybrownchick's work of raising AIDS awareness is "*AMAZING*" and users are invited to "FOLLOW" it (user 155). Thus, it is significant that in a tweet by @AIDSHealthcare, the choice between agreeing with Sacco and choosing to do charity is just rhetorical—the user knows what the right option is: "*If you disagree with @justinesacco's stigmatizing words, take the pledge to #endHIVstigma NOW.*" Users, then, frame Sacco in this simple shameful moral world of good versus bad, in which disagreement is seen as not only morally wrong but utterly stupid.

ii – Organization Based on Laughter

Davis (1971) has shown how in charivaris French youth groups used mockery and derision to rule over others in the community, to "reinforce order and suggest alternatives to the existing order" (p. 74). Similar to charivaris, online shamings are also a "...carnival treatment of reality" (p. 53). Indeed, humour is an essential part of social media culture in general, as pointed out by Davis et al. (2018),

Social media have fostered new forms of political communication and participation. These communicative forms take on the conventions of internet culture, which include wit, parody, sarcasm, co-optation, and playful memification as “economies of laughter have become inextricably entangled with ... civic processes” (Henefeld, 2016). Hartley (2010, 2012) calls this style of interaction “silly citizenship,” while Highfield (2016a) positions “irreverence” as a core element of digitally mediated political engagement. Together, these theories of politics on the internet point to humor as a widely used and highly valued practice within political deliberations as they take shape through intersecting social platforms” (p. 3900).

In Sacco’s case, humour is used as an instrument to shame her and to enforce rules.

Through shaming laughter, shamers mockingly (1) reinforce their rules such as those that derive from their value of anti-racism; and, (2) challenge a perceived group that does not go along with these values. Indeed, users make sure Sacco is ridiculed and humiliated in varied ways, as already explored in the previous chapter. So, the vast majority of jokes in this network are made at the expense of Sacco: she is the object of ridicule and mockery; she is the punch line used to amuse the audience. To avoid repetition, I will go through just a few more examples of tweets with humour that condemn, tweets that are a straightforward celebration of Sacco’s suffering and that expose her as an outsider.

Indeed, Sacco’s downfall is humorously celebrated by the users: “Going to work in a little bit. Hope I don’t get fired. Just kidding. I’m not Justine Sacco!” (user 183). They use parody and irony to express their wish for her to suffer harm: “justine #sacco gets police escort as she lands. Just kidding, she’s F*cked” (user 187); “(Former) PR executive turned infamous racist @JustineSacco has landed. *Unfortunately...*” (@OccupyLA). She is mockingly portrayed as someone who causes discomfort and suspicion—someone you might find troubling to sit next to on a plane:



Figure 35: User 184 uses the meme "Side Eyeing Chloe" to imagine the discomfort of whoever was sitting near Sacco on the plane

Sometimes the disapproval is explicitly stated while still using humour:



Figure 36: User 189 disapproves of Sacco's attitudes

As shown in the previous chapter, users also post humorous yet violent images about Sacco. In these images, humour has the effect of euphemizing the violence. In charivaris, the violence could be real or symbolic. A community could just burn effigies and enact fake burials, or it could dunk a culprit in a cesspool and make them ride the stang: . Charivaris' mockery and humour did not exclude those acts of violence. Actually, as Ingram (1984) says, mockery through laughter was basic to all charivaris, being "... sometimes mild and good-hearted, *but*

often taking the form of hostile derision” (p. 82, my italics). Humour and violence, then, could coexist for the purpose of punishing someone. Analyzing the Sacco case’s tweets, it is possible to see the same mechanism of punishment by mockery and violent shaming taking place. In the #HasJustineLandedYet tweets, like in charivaris, Sacco ends up being someone who can rightfully suffer violence and, thus, also serves as entertainment and laughter for the crowd. The violence and humour of Sacco’s shaming is summarized in the tweet below:



Figure 37: Another imagined arrival of Sacco in Africa. This picture was originally taken at Tahir Square, Egypt, during the Arab Spring, 2011; it shows soldiers beating a female protester and pulling off her head scarf. Shared by user 190.

The tweet repeats the pattern of violent tweets seen in the previous chapter and others present in the network: it uses humour; it expresses violence through an image, not through text; it attributes the violence to third parties, not to the poster—all mechanisms to euphemize the violence. Notice that, in these images, the possible violence against Sacco is presented in the form of jokes. In the same way, users refer to physical harm using *images*, not spelling it out with words. The use of humour and images allows the violence to be expressed (1) without it being explicit, and, (2) leaving a margin for interpretation that there is no real threat or wish of harm. The use of images and humour was a characteristic shared by all tweets with reference to physical harm, except for the tweet that wished Sacco had AIDS. Moreover, almost all tweets

with reference to physical harm did it as if the violent act was something *other people* would do—the authors of the tweets did not place themselves as perpetrators of the violence. In figure 39, for example, the user refers to “images from outside the airport”—violence is happening somewhere else, and the user is not responsible for it. The violent tweets are phrased as something the user is observing *others* doing, not doing themselves.

In sum, these users present violence as something that could be imposed upon Sacco, but they do so in a manner that does not constitute a direct threat; that is, it is not their responsibility, and it might be interpreted as just good humour.

The palatable message is a representation of Sacco literally being smashed—being trampled on— which is supposed to be funny and laughed at. The woman’s body and her underwear are exposed, and she is being handled like an object by the soldiers. In sum, the image represents an imaginary Sacco suffering violence and, at the same time, being exposed for the entertainment of the users. This image has been retweeted at least 134 times. It epitomizes the shaming, violent exposure of Sacco, who is represented as helpless among a larger number. It is noticeable, furthermore, how the violence is presented using mediatic language: “live images from the airport”, user 190 says, parodying a news live broadcast. Once again, that the shaming violence is something that can be watched and enjoyed is made clear. The irony, the racy image, the exposed body—they are all part of shaming and violence as entertainment.

And the users are, indeed, entertained: “More people are awaiting @JustineSacco to land than awaited Lindbergh or the Wright Brothers” (User 191); “Jobless Justine has to turn around and get right back on another plane. That means in 12 hours we can once again ask #HasJustineLandedYet” (User 192). It is important to highlight this amusement since it shows that the online shaming, as charivaris, have a function not only of punishment, but also of

providing a communal party for the users. Online shamings serve to punish, to enforce rules, *as well as to entertain the participants*. Punishment and shaming are, in this sense, entertainment: “This is better than watching a bad driver get pulled over by the cops” (user 193).

As observed by Davis (1971), charivaris had the objective of reinforcing the established order. Likewise, online shamings use humour to ridicule and deride Sacco—shaming and punishing her. In this way, the objective of maintaining and fortifying the values of the online networks is performed through the derision of the shaming. Nonetheless, the carnivalesque aspect of charivaris also had the potential to challenge the established order. This is also present in Sacco’s shaming. Indeed, humour is used with the objective of the users counterposing themselves with an imagined antagonist: the racist part of society. There is a clear sense, as said before, that American society is racist, and this must be fought through laughter: “Has Fox News signed up Justine Sacco for their next correspondent?” (user 170); “Megyn Kelly, Paula Deen, Phil Robertson, and Justine Sacco all walked into a bar and ordered White Russians” (user 168). In fact, Black Twitter users themselves recognize derision as their weapon against racism: “we [Black Twitter] use comedy to deal with the real-life violence of bigotry in our lives” (user 105). As charivaris, therefore, Sacco’s shaming also challenges the established order by mocking it.

Sacco’s shaming, therefore, serves a dual function: both maintaining community order and challenging what is perceived as the established community order. Its hostile derision and shaming punishment are similar, in this way, to the carnivalesque side of charivaris, as described by Davis (1971). Online shamings’ form, then, can be compared to that of a shaming carnival through which the network punishes the shamed in order to maintain the community order, challenge opposing worldviews, and entertain users.

3.2. Aimed at Regulating General Behaviour

Charivaris had the objective of not only correcting the charivaried person but also of setting an example to the community, regulating general behaviour (N. Z. Davis, 1971; Ingram, 1984; Nash & Kilday, 2010). Do shamings have the same effect? From the content of the tweets, it is visible that the shaming does have an effect on general behaviour, but not necessarily on regulating behaviour in the direction of anti-racism. Actually, the users perceive the effect of the shaming on their attitudes in differing ways.

For some users, the shaming has the same effect as the charivari of regulating general behaviour, teaching not only Sacco but the entire world that racism is wrong. For example, users discuss a “lesson” to be learned from the case: “And, to reiterate what [another user] said, the lesson here isn’t, ‘don’t say racist things’, but rather, ‘don’t be racist’” (user 159); the “take away from #HasJustineLandedYet should not be ‘careful what you post’, should probably be ‘wake up and don’t be an ignorant racist’” (user 153).

However, other tweets show that what other users take away from the shaming is the importance of good behaviour on social media, but not necessarily because they sincerely adhere to the values at hand. These tweets highlight the visibility of social media and how users internalize surveillance (Foucault, 1975). Indeed, Sacco’s case shows, as exposed in the previous chapter in the topic about metadiscourse, that users admonish each other about the dangers of using social media: “#HasJustineLandedYet is latest demonstration that Twitter should be treated like a TV mic: Always assume it’s on, and people are listening” (user 209); “Tweet in haste, repent at leisure” (user 13). The fact that users know that people are watching is a reason for them to observe their own actions and act in a socially acceptable manner: “I always tweet with the understanding that someone somewhere is taking a screenshot. Yup” (user 181). Marwick

(2012), based on Trottier, states that the surveillance among social media users leads them to “formulate a view of what is normal, accepted, or unaccepted in the community, creating an internalized gaze that contextualizes appropriate behavior” (p. 384). In Sacco’s case, taking into account the size of the consequences for a small online misdeed, the internalization of the gaze becomes even more pressing. The internalization, however, does not need to be of the values of anti-racism and HIV/AIDS awareness—the users simply need to admonish other users to be careful on social media, to be aware of the surveillant gaze, and to adopt an appropriate social conduct.

More prevalent, however, was the use of the shaming to increase solidarity towards the cause of HIV/AIDS in Africa, serving as a positive incentive towards attitudes perceived as “good”. As shown, many NGOs, governmental agencies and regular users took advantage of the case to give visibility to the HIV/AIDS cause. In some instances, they do so by opposing Sacco’s *bad* tweet to *good* attitudes about HIV/AIDS: “The #HasJustineLandedYet is based on a tweet by the idiot @JustineSacco. However, what @funkybrownchick is doing with it is AMAZING!” (user 155); “PR brilliance rises from PR idiocy: @AidforAfrica buys [justinesacco.com] domain, redirects it to donation page” (user 109). In this sense, Sacco’s shaming is a behavioural incentive that goes beyond banning racist attitudes: it also makes it necessary to engage in positive action to eradicate HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the shaming also has the effect of encouraging charity not because of an opposition to Sacco, but as an opposition to the shaming itself, which became a “dogpile”: for them, charity is a more “purposeful action” (user 114), and users should look for more “useful” outcomes than firing Sacco (user 142). In other words, online shamings serve as an example to the users in a larger sense than just the prohibition of racist behaviours: shamings also encourage engagement and awareness. This encouragement, might portray

opposition to Sacco's behaviour, contrasting *good* versus *bad*, or it might contrast *good* versus *bad* by criticizing the shaming itself as a dogpile or as an action with limited outcomes.

The shaming, then, also has an effect on general behaviour, not just on Sacco. Firstly, like charivaris, it prohibits a certain behaviour within the community, and the community internalizes that prohibition, either because the subjects learn the "lesson" related to the values at stake, or because they learn how to behave appropriately on social media. Either way, a behaviour is learned and internalized. Thus, the exemplary function of the charivari is equally present in the online public shaming. Moreover, the online public shaming affects general behaviour not only by imposing a prohibition and demonstrating what behaviours should be avoided, but also by encouraging a positive behaviour among users, who must be aware of and charitable towards the HIV/AIDS cause.

3.3. Extra-Legal Form of Social Control

As with rule creation, rule enforcement is also an enterprising act which depends on the power differentials possessed by those who want to impose a rule and those who are the target of it (Becker 1963). Moral crusade theories typically refer to rules created and imposed by the State through formal apparatuses, such as the police (Gusfield 1981; Zurcher et al. 1971; Becker 1963; Page and Clelland 1978; Beisel 1990). However, Becker (1963) does not restrict his natural history of rule enforcement to the legislative process. Indeed, as seen with the charivaris, rule enforcement can very well be "an extra-legal mode of social control" (Greenhill, 2010, p. 14) being applied by community members to other community members independently of the state's official rules.

Online shamings are also an "extra-legal mode of social control". Indeed, mass self-communication alters the media landscape and the communicative resources of the public,

allowing the many to speak with the many (Castells 2015; 2008). In this way, online public shamings are essentially characterized by the use of mass self-communication: it is the networked architecture of social media that allows a mass response to some wrongdoing, being, therefore, able to apply its rules independently from the state. Indeed, the first distinguishing feature of Sacco's shaming is how it happens without any form of state action. Users neither based their claims on legal norms nor demanded jurisdictional action or legislative changes. Moreover, the shaming does not compete with any official jurisdiction or use any official forms—in the United States, Sacco's tweet is not a crime or an infraction that could be addressed by state power. Mass self-communication allows, then, a horizontal and extra-legal form of social control similar to *charivaris*, through which users of the internet take it upon themselves to reach an understanding that some action was wrong, that it deserves consequences, and what these consequences are. As Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) explained, shamings are an informal social power since "...it depends on voluntary actions by those participating and is exercised extrajudicially and independently of the formal coercive powers of the state" (p. 13). Users, therefore, do not make claims on the state demanding normative changes to address this kind of behaviour. The phenomenon, thus, happens completely apart from any state competencies for rule creation or rule enforcement.

Besides functioning independently from the State, this informal, extra-legal form of social control that punishes even small offences with great consequences does not follow any form of due process, either in the definition of the rules or in their application. About due process, Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia's (2021) definition is:

Formal penal systems that respect due process values will include at least the following key due process features: i) that the penalties applied are explicit and transparently applied, and that these have been arrived at through a social-deliberative process that makes them the genuine penalties of a political community, in which institutions are accountable to the community for their penal standards; ii) that these penal rules

respect fundamental human rights; iii) that they are proportionate (in some rationally definable and defensible sense of proportionate); iv) that a trial or tribunal system for applying the penalties exists and that this gives those facing a potential penalty an opportunity to participate in the decisions being made, including by defending themselves against the charges or accepting them (pp. 19-20).

One could question, firstly, if it is proportional to submit Sacco to global infamy and for her livelihood to be taken away because of a tweet published for less than 200 followers.

Secondly, there is no “trial or tribunal system” that could give Sacco the chance to defend herself. From the very start—from Biddle’s whistle blowing—Sacco was assumed to be guilty and she could not even know about the accusations against her since she was still flying whilst her shaming was happening. Sacco’s lack of a defense, nonetheless, goes beyond not giving her space and time to argue for herself: this possibility is precluded for anyone who does not agree with the shamers’ condemnation: “Expose a racist and watch the RWNJs [right wing nut jobs] come out of the sewers to defend the rat. Happens every time” (user 178); “Reminder that Justine could just dig in and b like ‘sorry, not sorry’ and anonymous white ppl would fund her for life” (user 210); “Q for Justine supporters: how many free racist tweets does a person get before they’re asked to accept responsibility?” (user 211). Sacco’s defenders are, thus, classified as crazy right-wingers, with a special fondness for racists. Her eventual defenders, therefore, are also put within the simple good versus evil narrative in which any form of alignment with the shamed or criticism of the shamers leads to conclusions not only about the arguments being used but also about the very character of who the defenders are.³¹

As shown in a previous section, there is no clear reasoning about Sacco’s wrongdoing. Furthermore, there are no formal public deliberations on which rules to apply and how. As exposed by Bouvier (2020), the cancellation gains momentum based on a sense of shared outrage and agreement. There is no “social-deliberative process” of the “political community” (Aitchison

³¹Another example of this process was the reaction to Ronson’s *New York Times* article and book: social media users started attacking him online and concluding that “@jonronson is a fucking racist” (Ronson, 2015d)

& Meckled-Garcia, 2021, pp. 19–20). As seen in the previous sections, the shaming is the galvanization of a group of actors and their interests, which snowballs into a mass of outrage and visibility. Indeed, some of these actors aim to represent the interests of large portions of the population and have progressive and egalitarian objectives. Nonetheless, there is no deliberation, in the sense of weighing arguments and counterarguments. Furthermore, there is no clearly responsible agent or institution—the shaming is built upon the participation of thousands of people, none of them accountable for its consequences. And, it is important not to mistake the visibility of social media with an “explicit and transparent process” of punishment.

In sum, mass self-communication allowed marginalized voices to advocate for justice and equality, bringing their claims to the broader public sphere and allowing counterpublics to decide on and impose rules, without the participation of the State. However, it is important to remember that online public shamings are not exclusive to progressive publics, being also used to enforce sexist, racist and transphobic ideologies. Moreover, online public shamings are completely unaccompanied by formal safeguards, guarantees and deliberative procedures. This lack of guarantees can lead to the paradoxical result of minorities being the target of progressive groups who use shamings as a tool. Indeed, it is important to remember that “...due to fundamental power differentials that privilege Whiteness and maleness, those who challenge these structures are more likely to face harassment, systematically removing minority voices from the public sphere” (Marwick, 2021, p. 2). Indeed, research shows that women, LGBTQ+ people, Black people, Indigenous people and people with disabilities are the main targets of online hate (Joseph, 2022; UN Women, 2024). Scholars should be attentive, then, to the possibility that even progressive shamings might target mainly the minorities they supposedly champion.

3.4. Ubiquitous and Visible—Destroyers of Anonymity

The process of shaming Sacco takes place in an online space that, despite being owned by a private company, is open and free to whoever wants to join and observe. Sacco's shaming, therefore, happens in public—not in the Habermasian (2014) sense, but in the simple sense that it is available for anyone to watch and participate in.

This sort of publicity had an important function within charivaris. In those phenomena, the process of shaming depended on the publicization of scandal, of making visible to all what was once hidden and transforming the charivaried into a disgraced person (Thompson, 1993). In this way, charivaris destroyed privacy and imposed the community's values upon the individual (Ingram, 1984) and upon the charivariers themselves (McKningt, 2005). In online shamings, this openness to the crowd is also important; its function, nonetheless, must be nuanced.

Indeed, Sacco's tweet was not something *once hidden*—a secret the community comes to know. As with Cooper, Richards, Stone and Rowling, the perceived wrongdoing was already in the open, visible to anyone. Perhaps the only exception amongst the cases considered here are the PyCon engineers, who were making jokes among themselves—but even so, they were not in a private space and they were loud enough so others could hear. There were no secrets in these cases—actually, the shamed all acted within the bounds of what they thought at the time to be socially tolerable. Some defended their actions even after the shaming—Stone insisted her picture was no big deal; Richards and Rowling, up to this day, maintain their positions.

Secondly, while in charivaris the publicization of disgrace was through the exposition of the misdeed to the entire community, in the cases seen here the shamings are potentially visible to the entire world. Online shamings are a *visible* process. Thanks to the network's spreadability and visibility, as explained by boyd (2014) and Mayer-Schönberger, (2009) Sacco is a *globally*

infamous outsider. As explained previously, the reach of social media allows a piece of information, an image, a meme, or a tweet to be shared around the web without loss of quality. This allows users to share the screengrab printout of Sacco's tweet so that more and more people outside the original context know what she has said and comment on it. The visibility of her case, that is, the participation of people outside the original context, is *total*: Sacco's misdeed can potentially be known by the entire world. Users notice, comment and joke about this fact: "This woman became famous in a few hours for ALL the wrong reasons!" (user 194); "You know you messed up when you're more famous than Justin [Bieber]" (@YourAnonNews); "What an ignorant fool. How to tweet yourself into unemployment & global humiliation?" (user 152).

Therefore, while in a charivari the deviant had their secret made public inside a community, in the online shaming the deviant has their anonymity erased and their wrongdoing spread in a global scale. Differently from a charivaried person, the shamed person cannot move away from the community to start anew somewhere else.

.5. Ephemeral but Persistent

Another characteristic of the networked public that affects the shaming of Sacco is *persistence*, that is, the durability of online communications that do not vanish like speech (danah boyd, 2014; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009) and that make the shaming different from charivaris. Paradoxically, the process of shaming is, for the enforcers, *ephemeral*, as their participation lasts minutes or even seconds (Bouvier, 2020).

The characterization of Sacco's as a foul person is *persistent*: it is impossible for her to erase or even minimize her wrongdoing by deleting the tweet, which has already been printed out and multiplied across the network. Indeed, users recognize the persistent nature of Sacco's wrongdoing and comment on how ineffective it is to delete her tweet: "Deleting your twitter

account is like throwing a huge blanket over the car you just wrecked. Nothing to see here” (user 212); “She deleted it but it’s not going anywhere” (user 213). As shown, the persistence of the shaming is not only recognized but also *weaponized* by the users, who purposely share the printout of Sacco’s tweet with the intention of making them lasting and rendering deleting the tweet useless. The misdeed is infinitely reproduced, giving no space to forget it, which is different from charivaris, in which the misdeed was basically kept in memory only by the charivariers’ community or—at most—in a public record if the case ended up in court. Solove (2010) highlights how this perfect memory of the online world can damage human development:

There is a grave danger that people will enslave themselves and each other by making their past mistakes permanently and readily available for the rest of their lives. The long-standing value of giving people a second chance, of allowing people to reinvent themselves, might soon become a relic of a bygone era. This has profound effects on people’s freedom to experiment, to grow, and to change (p. 16).

In this sense, again, online shamings are different from charivaris, which could end with the reintegration of the culprit into the community.

The paradox is that such persistent damaging information is easy to create and to engage with. As explained by Ott (2017), “Tweeting...requires almost no effort at all. It is ridiculously easy” (p. 61), meaning that little thought and reflection are given before publishing a message. Indeed, to retweet a joke about Sacco all one needs to do is click on the retweet button. Shaming someone can be just a fleeting moment in a shamer’s day since “Tweeting requires little effort and may be done at the same time as doing other things, such as waiting in a queue for a coffee, while we engage with other social media in regard to more trivial matters, or as we leave a bad review about the service in a local restaurant” (Bratslavsky et al., as cited by Bouvier, 2020, p. 2). This is what Bouvier (2020) classified as the ephemeral nature of tweeting³²: “The simple

³² Bouvier (2020) attributes the notion of “‘ephemeral’ nature of tweeting” to Ott (2017) (in Bouvier’s words: “The tendency to incivility, along with the lack of rational argumentation and contradictions found within feeds around a broader mobilizing affective idea, can also be understood *in the context of what Ott (2017) refers to as the*

idea here is that when we tweet it may not be something especially well thought-through, reflected upon, nor planned” (p. 2).

Online shaming, thus, is an ambivalent practice: to the shamer it can be as trivial and ephemeral as waiting for coffee to brew; to the shamed, it is a persistent black mark that spreads around the globe.

4. Absolutism

This chapter has shown the complexity of Sacco’s shaming, with multiple actors, interests and practices—a social phenomenon that fails to neatly fit into the categories of rule enforcement or rule creation. Nonetheless, what this multitude achieves are the transformation of Sacco into an outsider through a full deviance creation process and the entertainment of the users through contemporary carnivalesque shaming punishment.

Indeed, the shaming is a full process of deviance creation since it combines the creation of rules with the enforcement of rules.

When talking about Black Twitter and how its networked causes already existed before the case of Sacco, it is visible that her shaming is just one moment, one action, in an ongoing effort to mould society’s rules. When users mix the individual and the political, they are engaging in specific actions that further the dominance of their political views in society. The shaming of Sacco, arguably, is a form of enforcement that works as a moment within a larger rule creation movement, which sets the example for others of what is an acceptable attitude or not. In this way, shamings mix the individual and the political, the creation and the enforcement, functioning as a tool to mobilize people and teach an anti-racist lesson to those who have not yet converted to the values in question.

‘ephemeral’ nature of tweeting” – p. 2). However, consulting Ott’s original text, I was not able to find such expression. Therefore, here I am attributing it to Bouvier herself.

We see, therefore, that the shaming is just a single moment, tool and strategy inside a larger movement that aims for racial equality. At the same time, the online shaming is an end in itself, punishing Sacco for her misdeed. It is not surprising, then, that Sacco's shaming mixes characteristics of rule creation in their modalities of crusades and enforcement.

Remembering the characteristics based on Becker (1963) and seen in Chapter 2, a crusade happens when *a person or group, gathering means or support, pushes for the creation of a rule because they believe in its content in a righteous and absolutist way*. The online public shamings are, as exposed, a form of rule enforcement that is an end in itself and that is used as a political tool to further rule creation aims. Shamers, using established online networks and hashtags, shamed and ridiculed Sacco, using her as a lesson about race, AIDS and Africa for a larger audience. In the moral crusades chapter, I showed that crusaders apply their will to extend rules in an absolutist fashion: they use any means necessary to achieve that goal. In that chapter, the cases of Sacco, Rowling, Richards, Stone and Cooper indicated that this absolutism is also the present in shamings: even the smallest fault might be subjected to severe consequences to make the shamed respect the shamer's cherished values. This preliminary finding is confirmed by the deeper analysis of Sacco's case.

As seen in the previous chapter, the users do not see a contradiction between the misdeed committed by Sacco and the consequences imposed upon her: "Know this: you are free to speak it! Just be prepared to face the consequences" (user 66). For the users, the consequences suffered by Sacco are due to her own wrongdoing, and fitting for what she wrote, after all, "Racism is not something to joke about!" (user194). Furthermore, her suffering is nothing compared to those who actually suffer with HIV/AIDS (user 195); and there is little space for empathy, considering

her privileged status as an alleged billionaire's daughter (untrue) and as a white person: "She'll be OK. She's white" (@RoomeeTimes).

It is possible to see here what Becker (1963) referred to in relation to crusaders:

The existing rules do not satisfy him because there is some evil which profoundly disturbs him. He feels that nothing can be right in the world until rules are made to correct it. He operates with an absolute ethic; what he sees is truly and totally evil with no qualification. Any means is justified to do away with it. The crusader is fervent and righteous, often self-righteous (p. 148).

Notice that these are features of crusaders, not enforcers, who Becker (1963) characterizes as less interested in the content of the norm than in maintaining their position and gaining respect from others.

In Sacco's case, nonetheless, this attitude of accepting any means necessary to deal with the wrongdoing is visible since, to the shamers, her actions are "*truly and totally evil with no qualification*". They are the "*perfect amounts of racism, white privilege & stupidity*" (user 197); unbelievably ignorant for the twenty-first century (user 48); and her "*Ignorance abounds*" (user 198). The enormous latitude given by the users to punishing Sacco's tweet is observable in their parodies relating the case to other types of racism, in which they refer to black people being unfairly arrested (user 175), getting shot (user 147), and being murdered (user 23). Sacco's tweet is, then, an unqualified evil that must be addressed and corrected by whatever means: "YOU GON' LEARN TODAY! Freedom of speech. NOT freedom from consequences" (user 199). The absolutism of moral crusaders is, therefore, present in Sacco's shaming. Here, there are no detached, objective, uninterested rule enforcers (Becker, 1963): the enforcement, as an end in itself and as a means to rule creation, is righteous and interested in the content of the rule; it imposes severe consequences for small infractions that lose proportionality in relation to other, more serious infractions.

The absolutism of online public shaming, nonetheless, lives alongside the material interests and entertainment that motivate the shaming aspect. As shown, numerous actors participate in the shaming process when seeking visibility, audiences, profits, reputation management, or online engagement and this contributes to the shaming. Likewise, the users—within Black Twitter, NGOs, the press, for-profit companies—all make use of humour to participate. The shaming exists to punish and advance social causes as much as it does to entertain and amuse. Humour is a means to shame Sacco and an end in itself for users, who follow the case like a TV show finale and try to get their wittiest messages shared and favoured.

5. Conclusion

Online public shaming is various phenomena inside a single process: a part of rule creation, an episode of rule enforcement, a festival of shame and violence. All this is comparable to moral crusades and charivari but is, at the same time, so particular to online public shaming that this phenomenon deserves a category of its own.

Online shaming is a slice in a larger process of rule creation: they are episodes in larger societal disputes over values and rules, over a piece of moral reality. In online shaming, supporters of a cause momentarily gather means and support to affirm their cherished values, using the punishment of an individual to make an example for others. In this way, online public shaming joins the individual and the political by making a single individual case a demonstration of a larger, insidious problem. Participants in this process are moved by their belief in the content of the rule, which they believe must be extended to apply to all members of society. This belief, in this specific demonstration allows for all means necessary to prevail, and accepts all consequences for the breaking of the rule as being *natural*.

However, online public shamings are not only part of an attempt to extend a rule. Different from moral crusades, in which the enforcement was left to uninterested parties, here the crusader and the enforcer become one. Shamings, in this way, are both a form of enforcement in themselves and the extension of a rule exemplified by this enforcement. And, for that, nothing is better than the use of public punishment—of shaming punishment. Through that publicity, the disgraced person is now visible to all, making an example of them for the community. Online public shaming works as a consequence of its absolutist features, mentioned above, and of this publicity. The shamers transform the culprit into someone low, into an outsider to the decent community, someone whose ties to society can be severed. For them, it is a *relief* not to work with Sacco anymore (user 150). The person can, therefore, be treated as an object to give pleasure to the crowd as entertainment, as the butt of a joke. Ridicule and derision reinforce the shame and amuse the shamers, who are able to extend and enforce their values at the same time they have a good laugh. Righteously entertaining, online public shaming punishes the culprit, reaffirms values within the community, demonstrates to opposing online imagined communities what values must be followed, gathers resources for moral and opportunistic actors, powers the social media industry of “likes,” gives users something to talk about and engages, amuses and entertains the crowd.

CHAPTER 8: Final Remarks

As said in the methods Chapter, Sacco's case has been chosen to be the main focus of this dissertation mostly because of its exemplarity and typicality in relation to online public shamings. Nonetheless, before finishing this work, it is necessary to ask again *how typical is Sacco's case?* Or, in other words, what can be extrapolated from her case to the other four cases referred to in this thesis and to other cases beyond that?

A definitive answer to that question depends on further research, especially other case studies that consider different variables such as the gender, race, imagined communities involved, values at hand, social status and fame of the shamed person, etc. For now, however, considering the other four cases in this thesis and the specificities of Sacco's case, it is possible to say it establishes a good model with basic features for the study of other online shamings, even though one can expect that some of its elements will present themselves in varying degrees in other cases. In sum, even though it is possible to say that the case presents crucial aspects that will be observed in several online public shamings, these might be present on a different scale. In this section, I will address both sides of the issue and highlight which elements of the case can be considered essential to the phenomenon and which should be relativized. For that, I will be considering information available about the other four cases, as well as examples of other online public shamings.

It is important to notice that most information about the other four cases comes from traditional media sources and that my access to the shamer's messages was limited. I have attempted to diversify and saturate the sample of messages for these cases; however, there are limitations due to the passage of time and access restrictions imposed by platforms such as Twitter. In other words, assessing how elements from Sacco's case apply to these other cases

does depend on further research and the following reflections are based on the small sample currently available.

1. The Shamers

Sacco's case is populated by shamers with multiple interests: some with a moral interest in it, others with more opportunistic objectives, and still others with mixed intentions, advancing, at the same time, a good cause and good online visibility. In this sense, the concept of *interest* (Becker, 1963) is useful to determine who will participate in an online shaming: those who have some type of advantage—moral or otherwise—in it will engage and participate. Lewis and Christin (2022) have shown how maintaining and appeasing an audience is reflected in YouTubers' cancel culture discourses. The interest of obtaining *visibility*, the main social media currency, should therefore be regarded as a potential incentive for users' participation in online public shamings. In cases like Sacco's and Rowling's, which gained global dimensions, for-profit companies might find it worth it to engage in the shaming and advertise their own products—even better if the products can be advertised as socially and morally desirable. Employers and business partners will try to avoid negative visibility, and traditional media companies will source and publish stories on social media, trying to gain a larger audience. The question is, then: do these actors need to be present to characterize the phenomenon?

In the other four cases, only in Rowling's did I observe the participation of for-profit companies (The Body Shop, with their tote bag "It's bloody natural"). Conversely, Richards, Stone and Cooper's employers reacted to the shaming by firing them and avoiding, thus, negative visibility. The same happened with artists and blogs associated with Rowling: they made sure to reject her views. In all cases, moreover, media companies engaged with and

reproduced the shaming discourse, creating the circle of reactions between media and social media seen in the previous chapter.

Taking into consideration the cases of Stone, Richards and Cooper, it is possible to conclude that opportunistic actors, such as for-profit companies, do not need to be a part of the shaming for this to be characterized as such.

In relation to traditional media companies, I have shown how media participation gives the shaming momentum and a sense of relevance to the shamers, besides feeding the movement with information and becoming news itself. Nonetheless, it is possible to envision a shaming campaign that works solely based on the mass self-communication between shamers. As I will show in a following section, online shaming does not necessarily draw the attention of traditional media—online public shamings might be a localized ordeal, circumscribed to a specific public, and still have severe consequences to the shamed person.

Indeed, who seems to be the essential participant in online shamings is the morally interested shamer who identifies wrongdoing and advances the punishment. What differentiates and characterizes an online public shaming is the actions of these individuals, who, via mass self-communication, unite to impose shame upon a wrongdoer, defending a cherished rule or value. Traditional media, NGOs, for-profit companies, and others interested in participating might join the shamers, but the phenomenon cannot exist in the absence of the latter.

Just one other actor might have the same essential role: the employer, the business partner or whoever is able to impose consequences upon the shamed person. As seen, Saint-Louis (2021) understands that *cancelling* only happens when there is a response from the employer, who fires the shamed person. In all cases seen here, only Rowling got out of her

shaming without visible financial losses. Did Rowling suffer online public shaming if there were no apparent consequences and no one to impose them?

Throughout this thesis, it was not my objective to understand the internal state of the shamed. What mattered here was not if the person actually felt ashamed or not but the process in which the participants engaged in activities to shame the wrongdoer, to portray them as lower, to try to cut their social ties. In this venture, it is an explicit objective of the shamers to obtain action from whoever can impose consequences upon the shamed. Indeed, when Sacco is fired, “*the deed is done*” (user 148). Likewise, the activist hacker group Anonymous threatens the employer SendGrid in order to fire Richards; a Change.org petition is made for the same end in relation to Stone; users share Cooper’s employer’s contact information; Twitter users call for a boycott against Rowling (users R15 and R16) and lament when they realize that it is probably not going to work (user R14). Shamers seek to impose, at the same time, a tangible consequence upon the shamed and sever their social bonds—no respectful company should have among its employees someone who is an untrustworthy outsider.

When this happens, when a shamed person suffers this sort of consequence for their wrongdoing, the online public shaming is complete, successful. Online shamers not only shamed the person but also imposed material consequences and effectively severed at least part of the shamed’s social bond (other parts are severed by making sure that no one is allowed to defend the shamed). And what happens when no such consequences are imposed, such as in Rowling’s case? In cases such as hers, the process of online public shaming developed, but was incomplete. Even though the shaming occurs, it fails to attain one of its main objectives. In cases such as these, the phenomenon is present, but not all of its consequences and objectives are reached. In this way, without an actor to impose consequences, the process of online public

shaming still exists—shamers still make concerted efforts to portray the shamed as morally lowered and to sever their ties—with limited results.

2. Shaming

As seen in the previous chapter, Sacco’s online public shaming punishes her by not only exposing her flaws to the world to see, but also by exposing her as an essentially flawed person. Shame encompasses the whole person who is placed outside the community of trustworthy individuals: their whole self—past, present and future—is seen as sullied and tainted. Sacco is submitted to what Tyson (2022) calls the fictionalization of shaming, that is, she is placed on the wrong side of a simple moral world divided between “good and bad, allies and enemies, human and subhuman” (p. 129). The users act with very little information and with a total lack of context about Sacco’s life and intentions, making the simplification of her character even more extreme—she is her tweet. This moral dichotomy is confirmed by comparing her to a counter-type, that of charity and awareness in relation to the cause of HIV/AIDS. The result is the users’ entrepreneurship to get Sacco fired, excluded from any position of responsibility and prestige. Sacco’s extreme exposition online, to a global audience, aims to erase her presence—and that of others like her—from society. Shame completes its cycle by achieving the break of the social bond.

“Hypocrite” (user A7), “idiot” (user A6), “dumbass” (user A5), “feminazi” (user A4), “bitch” (users A3, L11, L14 and R10), “Karen” (@MelodyCooper), “piece of shit”, “pathetic”, “vile”, someone who “deserves prison rape”, someone who “bring[s] dishonour on [herself] and the whole humanity” (Weiss, 2021), “bastard” (user R11), “disappointment” (user R1); someone who needs to grow up (user R12), someone whose death would make the country a better place (user L6), “dumb” (users L11 and L14), feces (user L9), swine feces (user L15): this is how

Richards, Cooper, Rowling and Stone have been characterized by users of different platforms. As in Sacco's, the other four cases show how the users shame the individual as someone low, lesser—the attack is not restricted to the actions, encompassing the whole person. And users make sure that their evaluation of the shamed person's character is known by the latter: they try to impose shame, that is, the perception that the individual is flawed and incomplete.

The cursing at Richards, Cooper, Rowling and Stone show that the shamers enter the fictionalized world of shame, in which the simple morals of good vs. bad prevail. See, for example, one comment supporting the Change.org petition to fire Stone (H, 2012). After saying that they had served in the military for many years, the commenter highlights the difference between soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice and people like Stone, who would represent a new, privileged and egotistical generation of Americans. When Melody Cooper (2020) publishes the Central Park incident video, the same kind of dichotomy is also present: she calls Amy Cooper a “Karen” who was doing something illicit (walking the dog without a leash in a zone where this is forbidden); her brother, on the other hand, is an “avid birder” who *politely* asks the dog to be leashed.

In this simple moral world, the righteous discourse about the consequences that are deserved—a natural outcome of the wrongdoing—is also present. User L16, for example, states that Stone's matter is simple: she disrespected *our* dead soldiers, so she got fired—and that is all there is to it. User L7 says that he does not feel sorry for the consequences felt by Stone, keeping in mind that she disrespected a grave. User A8 celebrates that Richards is now a meme. User C6 publicizes Cooper's employer's name and address, dismissing her eventual suffering: “#WhiteTears”, they say .

Unsurprisingly, to some shamers, the best outcome is to have the shamed excluded from society. A Facebook user wished Stone to be homeless, left in the cold and without protection, concluding that, if she died, we would be in a better place (user L6). User A8 tells Richards to disappear after calling her a name. Finally, in probably the most extreme example, an anonymous messenger tells Cooper: “A noble thing to do is to remove yourself from society as whole, so please kill yourself” (Weiss, 2021). It is important to remember that this latter message is just one glimpse of all the private messages shamed people receive during their ordeal.

It is possible to see, then, that the other four cases also contain elements and dynamics typical of shaming, of extreme exposure of not only someone’s misdeeds, but also of themselves as flawed agents, sometimes characterized as being less than human. Expulsion from society (and life) becomes a possibility, and the consequences that do fall upon the shamed are seen as just and proportional. In all cases, there is a lack of context that could deepen the audience’s understanding of who the shamed person is and in which circumstances the wrongdoing took place. The simple moral world of good vs. bad is present instead, in which these untrustworthy outsiders are punished.

3. Violence and Carnival

In Chapter 6, I showed that, in Sacco’s case, users not only make several references to entertainment products—they experience the shaming as entertainment itself. The treatment of the case as entertainment led to the use of humour with various objects, purposes and types—but that, one way or another, were all at Sacco’s expense. In Chapter 7, I showed that Sacco’s online public shaming served to punish her and to entertain users. Users, in a similar process to the carnival in charivaris, righteously ridicule Sacco, shaming her, reinforcing their values and

degrading competing ones. Shamers unite violence and humour, using the latter to euphemize the former and provide enjoyment to the audience.

In relation to this facet of the phenomenon, this study encounters limitations to generalization that are the result of both the Sacco case's intrinsic characteristics and methodological choices, namely: the circumstances of Sacco's long-distance flight to South Africa, the participation of Black Twitter as a distinct counterpublic, and the use of the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet as a search query that captures some tweets and not others. Indeed, all these factors end up by emphasizing the humorous, entertaining dynamics in the shaming process for Sacco.

Indeed, the case possesses a very peculiar characteristic: Sacco entered her flight and went offline while the world reacted to her tweet, creating a real-life cliffhanger for Twitter users to watch for. The expectation of *schadenfreude* created the perfect opportunity for users to compare the case to entertainment products and enjoy it as entertainment itself. This joyful expectation is perfectly reflected in the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet: it describes what Twitter users are waiting for with a comical twist. In this way, when the chosen search query is the hashtag, logically, the tweets that are retrieved reflect the thoughts of users who are at least aware of the globe-spanning joke that is waiting for Sacco. Moreover, Black Twitter brings discursive practices of Black counterpublics that offer a colourful dressing down of Sacco—an essential feature of its fight against racism. As said by user 105, Black Twitter "...use[s] comedy to deal with the real-life violence of bigotry in [their] lives".

These factors suggest that Sacco's case is probably unique in relation to the amount of amusement that Twitter users had engaging with it. One could say that Sacco's case offered the perfect conditions for the derisive, amusing, humorous side of shaming to manifest. Nonetheless,

this does not mean, that other cases are devoid of these characteristics. Actually, it is important to remember why I chose the hashtag as the search query in the first place. Among the possible keywords to be used in the research, #HasJustineLandedYet was the one with more results—substantially more: the words “Justine Sacco” had only 35,000 results while #HasJustineLandedYet had 50,000. It is possible, then, that the humorous nature of the hashtag had given it leverage in relation to other possibilities. Either way, the fact is that the hashtag was the search query with the most visibility and reach, which already shows that the entertaining nature of the case might not be purely accidental.

Moreover, as shown in Chapter 2, there is evidence of humour being present in the four other cases: user A1 sarcastically reminded Richards that she had been fired for a tweet, adding “LOL”; user R11 creatively told J.K. Rowling to fuck off and mind her own business; user L9 stated that he had no time for a Twitter conversation because they needed to go to the toilet to do a Lindsey Stone; and user C6 used irony to doxx Amy Cooper: “A terribly sad day to be Amy Cooper Head of Insurance Investment Solutions at Franklin Templeton (@FTI_US) in NYC. Franklin Templeton Investments [telephone and address] 📞 😊 Do what you gotta do”. Even though more data is necessary to fully establish the use of humour in these cases, there are already clues that show that amusement is not exclusive to Sacco’s shaming.

In fact, humour seems to be one of the essential features of the phenomenon, as it is an essential part of social media culture in general (Davis et al., 2018). Humour not only entertains the user who propagates it but also attracts other users to the content, thereby creating visibility for the original poster. It is important to remember that social media is an environment designed to be based on likes, shares, retweets—on visibility. Humour achieves several goals in this way: it gives visibility to the user posting the content and to their purpose, it entertains the poster and

the audience, it gives pleasure in shaming, and it punishes by ridiculing the shamed person. Humour also euphemizes and authorizes the use of symbolic violence against the shamed and for the enjoyment of the crowd. Thus, even though it must be admitted that the *amount* and *relevance* of humour and entertainment in Sacco's case is probably unique, the presence of these elements should be expected in online public shamings in general, to a greater or lesser degree.

4. Enforcing Rules Without the State

In Chapter 7, I explored how the shaming of Sacco constitutes a specific form of rule enforcement. I classified her shaming as an extra-legal form of social control, working without substantial participation of the state, as well as lacking formal or substantial due process. As a process that neither follows pre-determined rules nor gives an opportunity for the shamed to present their version of the facts, I reiterated Marwick's (2021) warning about how it might preferentially target vulnerable populations, such as women, people of colour and Trans people.

As rule enforcement, Sacco's online public shaming works by creating global infamy and destroying anonymity. Furthermore, despite its permanent effects for the shamed, it is an ephemeral process for the shamers, who can easily engage in it while performing other, mundane activities. Finally, the enforcement works not only by punishing Sacco but also by making users internalize surveillance and engage in social behaviour perceived as adequate, both by not (publicly) voicing racist opinions and by actively supporting and donating to HIV-related causes.

A similar pattern can be observed in the four other cases. Certainly, the only case involving the state is Cooper's, and even in that case, the participation was minimal: she was charged with falsely filing a police report, and the charges were dropped after she completed therapy. The negligible presence of the state or of any substantial appeals for it to take action

reaffirms two different things: (1) the power of Twitter, and, (2) the fact that any action or opinion, even if minor, might be targeted by shamers.

Indeed, the relative absence of the State shows that the "Power of Twitter" (more properly: of networked action in an environment of mass self-communication) is self-sufficient to address the perceived wrongdoing and punish it. This does not mean that users will not resort to the state if possible: all means available will be used by shamers to address the perceived evil at hand. But if this is not a possibility, not much is lost: online shamers are capable by themselves of imposing the necessary punishment upon the shamed or upon whoever gets in the way of online justice (as was the case when SendGrid did not immediately fire Richards). As Trottier (2018) points out, one might observe online shamings in which the state extensively participates and even profits from the shaming—by imposing further punishment beyond what is institutionally allowed. Nonetheless, the presence of the state is not a necessary condition for the phenomenon to be characterized.

Secondly, due to the lack of due process in both rule enforcement and rule creation, any incident, even a minor one, can constitute an offence punishable by online public shaming. The cases in this dissertation are a clear example of this: out of five, four started because of jokes (Richards, Rowling, Sacco and Stone). One might wonder if the world of online public shamings will be a world without irony, sarcasm or risky jokes. Indeed, the internet is known for not being a good place for irony and sarcasm. The lack of intonation in text-based communications makes it difficult for other users to identify these styles of speech. In certain spaces, like Reddit, users work around this problem by using the characters /s at the end of a text to indicate sarcasm in their messages. This difficulty is, in itself, ironic, considering the importance that humour had in

Sacco's shaming. Anyway, in an environment of context collapse (boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2021), any act or opinion might encounter a spectator who utterly disagrees with it.

5. Destroyers of Anonymity

Sacco's case spread across the globe, making her infamous worldwide. The other four cases in this thesis also had a broad reach, making it to traditional media headlines. Nonetheless, the phenomenon does not need to be so dramatically widespread to occur. More local processes may take place, provided that out-of-context people participate in the shaming. Even if the four other cases seen here do not provide a useful example of a limited online public shaming, in the initial research to choose the cases, I encountered geographically limited cases, such as Brazilian influencer Mariana Ferrer's or the Brazilian postsecondary admissions quotas defrauders'. During this PhD, moreover, as more people became aware of my research topic, I came across several stories of specific individuals being shamed in specific, circumscribed contexts, but with damaging effects, nonetheless. The loss of anonymity, in these cases, will be limited to a certain circle, not reaching the global humiliation suffered by Sacco.

6. Permanence

In relation to rule enforcement, at last, a few words must be said about the permanence of consequences. In all cases, there is an element of permanence since the digital memory remains accessible and easily searchable. In massive cases like Sacco's, it is unlikely that a Google search for her name will ever fail to deliver results mentioning #HasJustineLandedYet. But the internet does move on, and so did the characters in these five online dramas. Two of them, Sacco and Stone, eventually found jobs again one year after the incident. Richards had a harder time, especially after the publication of Jon Ronson's book, with her online shaming sprawling over the years. In late 2023, Cooper (2023) wrote to *Newsweek* reporting that, "Over three years later,

I am still in hiding. I am scared to be in public. I still can't get a job that meets my qualifications. And there have been long stretches of unemployment. All leading to thoughts of self-harm.” Rowling is still the one who had the best outcome. She keeps tweeting against Trans rights (as of August 2025, her Twitter feed contained an impressive number of tweets about the topic), and the Harry Potter franchise is being adapted into an HBO series for 2027. At the time of her shaming, she was able to use her personal blog to expound her exact point of view, and an apology has never been issued.

It is hard to tell why different women experienced different lengths of time of consequences. Maybe Stone and Sacco's misdeeds are seen as minor compared to what Cooper and Richards did—the former two uttered opinions that ultimately did not directly harm anyone, while Cooper threatened the life of a black man and Richards had a white man fired. Maybe it is the fact that the wrongness of Stone and Sacco's is more debatable (for example, some consider that Sacco was actually joking about privileged white people), while Cooper and Richards' actions attracted a more firm rejection, that is, there is little doubt that what they did was wrong. Perhaps it is because Jon Ronson had a mostly favourable view of Stone and Sacco in his 2015 book, whereas he was not so gracious towards Richards (McEwan, 2015; Ronson, 2016). In relation to Rowling, her economic and mediatic power certainly play a role in her ability to continue her anti-Trans advocacy. Nonetheless, it must also be taken into consideration that she was shamed for voicing opinions that might still be popular—while it may be extremely hard to find anyone who publicly agreed with the literal sense of Sacco's tweet, one does not need to scroll down much to find supportive replies to Rowling.

Permanence, therefore, is present in all cases, since their digital memory will hardly fade away. However, the endurance of the consequences seems to be quite varied among cases and to

depend on different aspects of them. Further research is necessary to understand what makes some people able to bounce back while others cannot.

7. Online Imagined Communities

One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that Sacco's online shaming entangles the processes of rule creation and rule enforcement. As seen, Black Twitter had already been involved over the years with the fight for racial equality in the United States when Sacco's tweet came along. Her online public shaming serves the dual purpose of punishing her for her perceived wrongdoing and setting an example of what is acceptable or not in society's moral reality. Sacco's punishment, therefore, is encrusted in a larger, older process of creating rules for the defence of Black people in the United States. In this way this, the roles of enforcer and creator mix, and the former gains absolutist features: Sacco represents an absolute evil, that must be fought against with all means necessary. In this way, the consequences that fall upon Sacco do not seem exaggerated: freedom of speech, not of consequences, the users say.

To understand Sacco's shaming as an entanglement of rule creation and rule enforcement, it is essential to notice the presence of Black Twitter in the case. In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept of online imagined communities (boyd, 2014) and exemplified it with the network of progressive Black Americans on Twitter, who join online through activism, culture and fandom. Indeed, Black Twitter is a great example of an online imagined community: consistently and throughout time, the network has gathered around themes inside Black culture and progressive causes, creating a relationship between users that, despite not knowing each of the members of the community, identified it as existing and themselves as members.

The question is, therefore, does such a stable network need to exist to form an imagined community? Are only stable communities responsible for online public shamings, or can more spontaneous ones also engage in the practice?

It is challenging to answer this question based on the other four cases, as a deeper analysis of participants and their discourses would be necessary. It is possible that Amy Cooper's case involved a more stable network, namely, #BlackLivesMatter, since a few users mentioned the hashtag when referring to her case. Moreover, the fact that George Floyd died the same day that Cooper decided to call the cops on a Black man made the two subjects converge. Either with the participation of Black Lives Matter—an older and stable network—or without it, the case attracted people interested in the safety of Black people in American streets and in confrontations with the police—people interested in seeing equal rights prevail. Likewise, Rowling's tweets attracted people who found that giving Trans people equal respect is something important but more evidence would be necessary to verify if this was a previously established network. Stone, in turn, attracted people who saw value in and the need to show respect for the sacrifice made by soldiers. A Facebook group and a Change.org petition helped gather these people together and voice their grievance against Stone. Again, it is not possible to know if such a network existed beforehand. Finally, Richards was shamed by people who thought her actions to be disproportionate and uncalled for, jeopardizing a family's livelihood. In her case, communities on 4chan helped organize the attacks. Further research would also be necessary to determine if these communities shared similar values beforehand.

It is not possible to answer, therefore, how old and how organized an imagined community must be in order for it to facilitate online public shaming. However, what is visible from all five cases is that people gather to shame someone in order to protect a value they all

cherish. All the cases seen here revolve around a certain value that is perceived by the users as having been broken by the culprit, and the users make explicit what the value is: Melody Cooper says that publishing the video of the Central Park incident is a stand against injustice; mr-hank highlights in the *Hacker News* forum that Richards has a large following, that with power comes responsibility, and that her attitude led to the firing of a father of three; several users point out to J.K. Rowling how menstruating is not a condition *sine qua non* for being a woman; user L7 states that Lindsey Stone deserved her consequences because graves should be respected.

To protect these values, users organize. If they organize in more or less stable ways is a question, but they do organize: they share information about the shamed person, furthering the latter's characterization as a lesser individual; they identify and share effective mechanisms of punishment, such as pressuring the individual's employer. In sum, participants in online public shamings identify the threat to their cherished value and perceive they are not alone in its defence. They leverage their numbers, utilize social media tools and characteristics that facilitate sharing their perspective and apply pressure for punishment. It is not possible to know for how long, but, at least for a moment, an online imagined community forms around a common cause and defends it.

In sum, from Sacco's case it is not possible to extrapolate the existence of stable and pre-existent online imagined communities in each of the other cases. Nonetheless, as said in Chapter 3, the perception of a community battling to defend the same values and organizing to do so exists. The online shaming happens not only because of individual contributions to it, but as a concerted act of people who understand each other as fighting for the same cause. Online imagined communities are present in online public shamings, therefore, even if momentarily.

In this process, users engage not only in punishing the culprit for their wrongdoing but also in extending their cherished rule to the entire society. In cases like Sacco's, this effort precedes the online public shaming, which becomes a moment in a larger crusade for rule creation. It is not possible to know if all cases here are the same, in the sense of being inserted in a long-standing fight for rule creation. But in all of them, there is concern with larger patterns of attacks against the value: Rowling represents TERFs (Trans-exclusionary radical feminists); Stone, the entitled youth; Richards, the feminazis; Cooper, the white supremacists. In all cases, enforcing the rule is, at the same time, an affirmation of values, of their importance, and a degradation of the group that opposes them.

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